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AMAZING science fiction

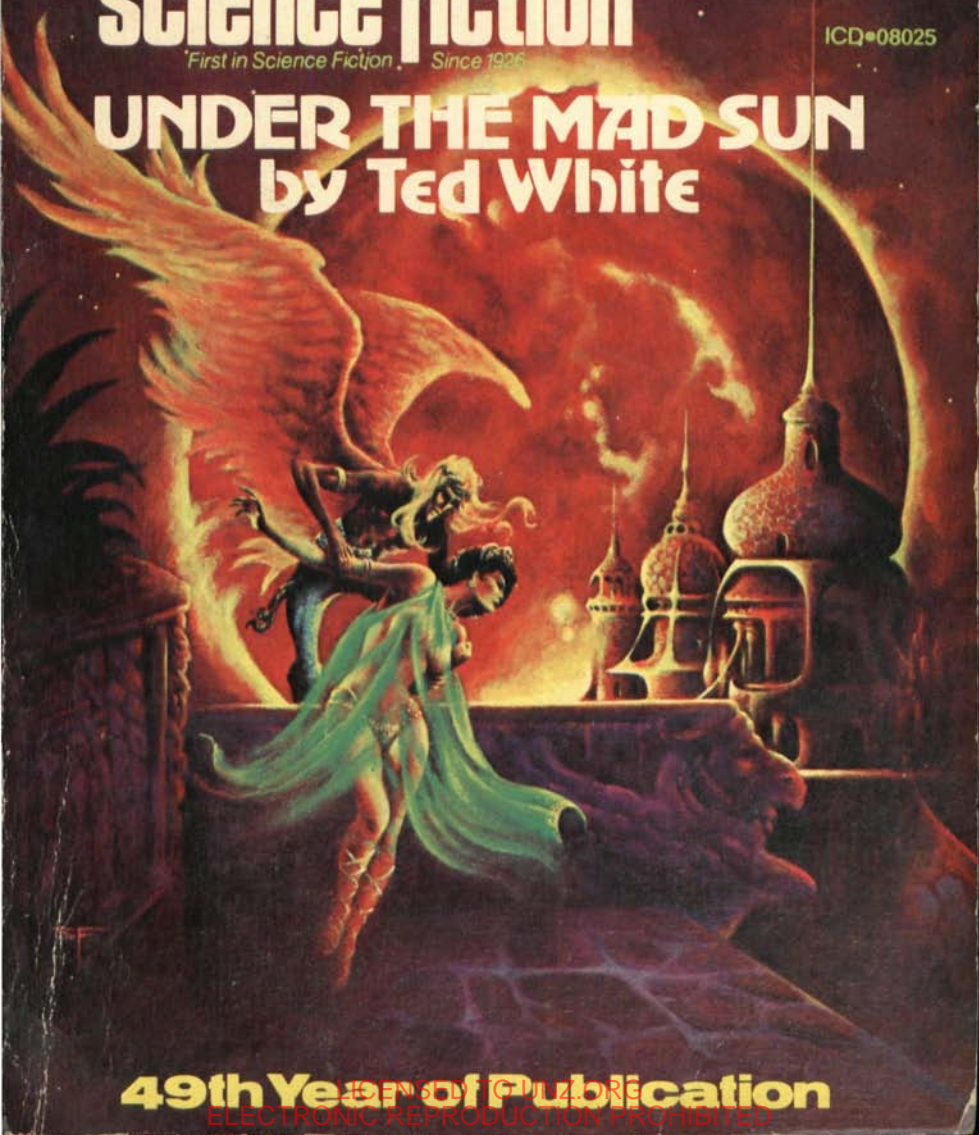
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UNDER THE MAD SUN by Ted White



49th Year of Publication

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MAY, 1975

Vol. 48 No. 6

49th Year of Publication

**TED WHITE'S OUTSTANDING NEW NOVELET,
UNDER THE MAD SUN 6**

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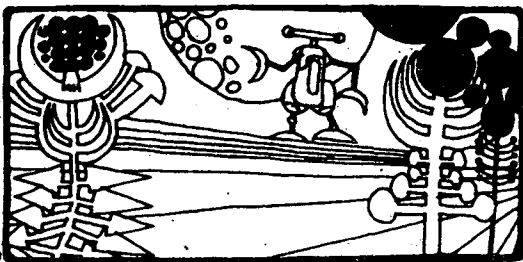
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**TED
WHITE**

EDITORIAL



THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME: You've probably already noticed that we changed the wording on our spine last issue to read "49th Year of Publication", a statement unique to this magazine among all the stf magazines extant. This year represents a sort of count-down for us—with each issue I find myself saying to myself, "Well, that leaves only x issues until our 50th Anniversary Issue." In less than one year from the time you read this, **AMAZING** will be celebrating her fiftieth birthday!

It seems incredible to me. Not so very long ago I prepared the 45th Anniversary issue (which included Ursula K. Le Guin's "The Lathe of Heaven") and wondered what the next five years would bring. Now I have less than a year left—and work has already begun on our Golden Anniversary issue.

It's too early yet to tell you everything that will be in that issue, but one thing I can tell you: It's going to be the finest issue we've ever published. It will be double-sized—twice as thick as usual—and will be a unique blend of the old and the new. Unlike earlier anniversary issues, in which most of the contents were devoted to reprints of past triumphs, the 50th Anniversary issue will be a complete *new* issue (with some startling—I hope—surprises in store) *plus* a unique memento of our

origins.

But, the contents of that issue aside, celebrating our Golden Anniversary represents in itself a unique and valuable achievement. There are damned few magazines still in existence which can point to fifty years of continuous publication—and none of them were creators of a new or special field like ours. **AMAZING** was the first stf magazine of them all. She has watched a field swell and build around her, watched it go through stages of collapse and rebuilding more than once, and she has endured. So stick with us—our Golden Anniversary will mark not only fifty years of publication, but the beginning of our second half of a century of publication.

SCIENTIFICTION: When this magazine began publication the term *science fiction* did not yet exist. For its first few years of existence, **AMAZING STORIES** published "scientifiction," a contraction of "scientific fiction," which was soon shortened by our readers to "stf"—pronounced "steff."

After "science fiction" was coined the earlier word fell gradually into disuse—but "scientifiction" took a long time dying. One of the better pulp stf magazines of the forties and fifties, *Startling Stories*, retained the word on its spine for most of its publishing history, and the abbreviation,

(cont. on page 119)

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When Michael Nally showed me his drawing of a winged man holding a blood-dripping sword, I decided immediately that I wanted to publish it—but since it did not illustrate a story, a story would have to be written around it. And, as I stared at the illustration (found, in part, to the right of this blurb) I realized that I wanted to write that story—that in fact I knew the story I wanted to write, then and there. The story which follows, despite the implications of the illustration, is science fiction—not fantasy. But it draws for inspiration upon the science-fantasy of two great woman writers to whom I respectfully and affectionately (respectively) dedicate it: Leigh Brackett and Marion Zimmer Bradley.

UNDER THE MAD SUN

TED WHITE

THE RED SUN was huge. That was her first impression upon stepping from the shuttle pod. It filled a quarter of the sky, hanging like an open mouth. Then the heat, dry and tasting of dust, enveloped her, the escaping air from the open door of the shuttle dissipated, sucked up.

"Hot, isn't it?" said a voice behind her—Paul Rheems, whose compartment on the starship had been next to hers and whose steps had dogged hers nearly every minute of the voyage.

"Is it?" she answered without inflection. "I hadn't noticed. It's so good to be out in the open, out of that canned air." *Liar.*

"This way, please," a man in a wrinkled uniform said. "Customs over there," pointing.

The sun was too large. She felt

its presence like that of a giant malignant entity—alive and cancerous. It robbed her of her senses. She had to fight down the rising adrenalin of panic. She knew, from shipboard briefing, that it was a red giant. It was not going nova, nor was this planet in any danger of falling into it. But it was too large for easy sanity: too large and too red. Its light was bright enough to fill the barren landing field with reflected glare, but too red for human eyes to easily adjust to. The redness washed out color; the eye compensated for the monochromatic reds by translating the scene into blacks and whites—mostly the latter, the glare washing out detail like an overexposed print.

"This way," the uniformed man said again, touching her elbow de-

Illustrated by MICHAEL NALLY



ferentially. *He must be used to it*, she thought, and, simultaneously, *I must look like a dimwit*. Obeyingly she turned in the direction of his pointing finger and starting walking across the fire-blasted concrete toward a low flat featureless building that shimmered in the heat. Behind her she heard the scurrying footsteps of Rheems, who seemed to feel it was his duty to act as her escort. Well, she'd be rid of him soon enough.

The customs building was a relief: air conditioning and normal colors again. But she noticed, curiously, as the customs man examined her travelling cards and she answered his routine questions, that the man's eyes were red.

He suddenly glanced up at her from his computer terminal and their eyes locked. She dropped her own in confusion, but he said, quite simply and in the same tone in which he'd questioned her, "I expect you've noticed the contacts I'm wearing. Filters—they cut down on the glare outside, and—more important—ease the shock of transition from the outside to the lighting in here. Most of us working here wear 'em."

"Oh," she said, relief coming over her with his matter-of-fact explanation. "Why don't you just use red lights in here, then?"

"That's mostly for *your* benefit, Miss Broneta," the man said. "Many long-time residents do use red-scale lighting in their homes,

and some of the businesses—especially those who serve the natives as well—they do too. But it was felt that off-worlders such as yourself would prefer this kind of lighting."

"So you have to wear lenses? That doesn't seem right."

"I have no complaints," he said, and she sensed a greater distance between them with his words. He returned his attention to the coded cards in his hands, shuffled them rapidly, then returned them to their pass-purse and handed it up to her.

"I hope you enjoy your stay here, Miss Broneta," he said. Then his gaze moved beyond her and he said, "Next."

WHEN SHE entered the outer lobby of the customs building a large, thickset man detached himself from the small crowd of waiting people and crossed quickly to her. "Ellie!" he said smiling, his voice booming in the room. "Welcome home, girl!" Before she could more than acknowledge his greeting, his arms were around her in a bear-hug and she felt herself almost lifted from the floor.

"Arielle—Miss Broneta—!" cried a familiar voice.

The arms released her suddenly, and she almost fell against Paul Rheems. Turning, she smiled at him with total insincerity and said, "Ah, Mr. Rheems! I should like you to meet my father, John Broneta. Father, this

is Mr. Rheems. We were ship-board acquaintances." She turned back to Rheems before her father could acknowledge the introduction. "I expect I shan't see you again, so I'll say goodbye." She extended her hand. "Goodbye."

The young man took her hand and, holding it too long, stammered out his hope that they might meet again. "I mean, after all, we were practically *companions*—on board the ship, I mean."

"I'm afraid it's unlikely," she said, quick to dash his expectations. "Your business is entirely in the Colonial Capital here, I believe?" Accepting his nervous nod, she went on ruthlessly: "My father's home is on another continent—quite some distance away. Our affairs are very local, I'm afraid. And now—" she prodded her father's ankle with the tip of her toe—"I'm afraid we must be going. Goodbye. It *was* nice to have met you, Mr. Rheems."

"—Paul," he said helplessly, behind her. "Uh—goodbye . . ."

"Was that really necessary?" Broneta asked her as they crossed the concrete glare to his parked Saber. "You quite cut the poor boy to shreds."

"Really, Dad," she said. "You don't know what a pest he was."

"I'm sure you were able to take care of yourself. You handled that scene quite expertly."

She laughed. "Thanks, Dad. I hope so. Oh, wouldn't it be awful if he turned up in Falcon City—

—and invited himself to enjoy our hospitality?"

"That depends on whether he realizes that it's only eight hundred kilometers from here and not, umm, a continent away." The big man stooped a little to fit his magnetic key into the Saber's door lock. Then he gave his daughter a cheerful grin. "I haven't officially welcomed you to the planet, Ellie. Welcome to Phoenix. Welcome to dirt, dust, heat and madness. I'm glad you're here at last. I've missed you—you're a full-grown woman, now!"

As he spoke, Broneta slid open the door to the Saber's cockpit and gestured her in. But she froze, half way in. "Dad! Is this your idea of a welcome-home joke?"

"Eh? I don't—"

She moved aside and he saw it too: sitting on the pilot's seat of the Saber was a skull, sun-bleached and grinning up at them. At first she saw it as a human skull but then she realized that its shape and configurations were subtly alien: the empty eye sockets followed the high angular cheekbones in an upward slant, lending a demonic appearance which was enhanced by the grinning shape of the jaws which curved upwards on each side. The skull was narrow, its brow ridge nearly absent but high. It had a fragile look, as if the bone structure was paper-thin, lacking human-substantiality.

She turned her gaze to her father. In this blood-stained light it was hard to be sure, but he seemed to have lost his usually ruddy complexion and his face looked drawn and tired. "Dad—?"

She saw him making a visible effort to pull himself together, to reconstruct his features into a smile. It was a frightening failure.

"Dad, what's going on?"

Broneta reached into the Saber, grabbed the skull, and threw it down against the concrete where it smashed into skittering fragments. "Get in," he said, his breath rasping and heavy. "Get in and—no, wait! Let me check it out first. There's no telling . . ."

She watched as he climbed into the Saber and then turned her eyes again to the bone-fragments at her feet. Very dry, very brittle, very fragile—a native skull? She'd seen pictures of the natives, of course: slender, winged, beautiful and humanoid. She'd thought them deliciously exotic when her father had sent her those first pictures along with his tape of his struggle to establish himself on Phoenix. But she'd been much younger then. It was a rude shock to meet her first "native" under such circumstances. She pushed at one piece of the skull with her toe, then pulled her foot back, feeling unaccountably ashamed of herself.

"It's okay—nothing tampered with that I can find. Climb in."

She strapped herself into the other seat and watched her father

handle the controls. His hands seemed to shake and to hesitate, but the Saber responded smoothly, the turbines' whine rising in pitch until the field generators cut in and the machine lifted easily into the air to find and radar-lock into its flight path. —

"Now, Dad—what about that skull—?"

PAUL RHEEMS WAITED just inside the glass door at the customs building until he saw the Broneta Saber lift into the air and disappear in the glare-red sky. Then he pushed out into the heat and made his way to the spot where the craft had been parked.

He stopped still when he saw the shattered fragments of the skull, then stooped quickly to pick up a piece. Rising more slowly, he turned the bone-fragment over in his fingers, examining it. It was thin—so thin that he could easily snap it with his fingers. He picked up a handful of pieces and stared at them for a long time, the heat weltering around him forgotten.

II

THE HOUSE was not at all what she'd expected. She'd known her father as a man who was spare and austere in his tastes. Their home on Earth had been simply furnished, functional but imbued with her father's character and warm in color, rich in atmosphere. It had formed the basis of her own taste and in memory the

home they had shared until her mother had finally died was her ideal.

This place could hardly offer greater contrast. It was opulent. Yes, opulent was the word for it, she reflected as she showered away the grime of three and a half weeks star-travel (chemical baths that never left her feeling clean) and four hours in the Saber. Standing in the showering cubicle she was surrounded by mirrors: non-fogging, especially treated, water-repellent mirrors. Could anything be more contrary to her father's taste? They must have been hideously expensive, and their sole function was narcissistic. It was amazing how totally they revealed one to oneself, though . . . She tapped the control and the needle-shower cut off, to be replaced by buffets of hot air, and she found herself examining herself critically in the mirrors. She swung her head to the left and watched as her compound mirror image swung *her* head in the other direction and she was regarding herself in profile as her image gazed off to the right at another profile while *it* stared in turn at yet another profile, in the mirror to her left . . .

She was not, at 24, badly made, she decided. Her breasts were small enough to retain their teen-aged pertness. Her stomach was not as flat as she would have liked, but she had been told, on another planet and another occasion, that her stomach was

"poochy" and definitely possessed erotic appeal. Her buttocks were full and jutting, a complement to the flare of her hips—she turned to face herself and looked beyond her image's shoulder to a more distant image of herself as seen from the back—from her respectably narrow waist.

She was short for women of her time—only 177 centimeters—and as was the fashion her body was, from the neck down, totally hairless. (She wondered what the style was here; should she continue to depilate?) The hair that crowned her head was a glossy black, short and sculpted into what would be a crest if she had not just washed it. She had a device in her luggage—which had yet to arrive, she suddenly realized with a stab of helplessness—which would reshape the hair into its customary upsweep. Just now her hair looked bedraggled but not unbecoming; a close-cropped skull-cap of black, still plastered by the shower against her scalp. (She pondered the desirability of letting it dry that way, versus letting the air blow it dry as a sort of black fuzzy halo around her head.)

Finally she regarded her face. It was not, she decided gratefully, a "pretty" face. Yet she had been told she was beautiful by more than one man in the last few years. It was hard sometimes to see what they meant by the word "beautiful;" but although she had sometimes wished for a face with

more character—one that will age well—she was not, on the whole, unhappy with the one she had. Her nose was too big, of course, and missing only a few hours of sleep darkened the area under her eyes, but—she grinned at herself—she had good teeth and a warm smile, and she liked the way the corners of her eyes crinkled.

The jets of air were becoming uncomfortably hot; she was dry. She tapped the control again and the air shut off while the mirrored wall to her right swung open into the room beyond.

She walked across the thick carpet in her bare feet, detouring around the pool in the center of the room, her body reflected back at her from nearly every wall surface. She felt as she had upon entering the room for her bath: exposed.

The room beyond was her bedroom; all of this was part of her suite, her father had explained. The suite included two other rooms as well, one obviously for use in receiving visitors, another apparently intended as a study or den for more or less private use.

And that was only *her* part of this vast house. *Some house! More like a palace!* It puzzled her. But that was far from all that puzzled her. Her father's explanation for the skull in the Saber was so obviously designed to evade the facts that she had seen through it instantly. This talk about minor labor problems with the natives

and what must have been simply a practical joke committed by some fun-loving acquaintance of his was simply unbelievable. She had *seen* his reaction to the skull: no practical joke could have evoked anything like it. She knew her father too well for that . . . didn't she. . . ?

And that was what troubled her most of all, she realized. She *thought* she knew her father well, but it had been eight years. Time enough for a man to change—in unaccountable ways. Still, nothing in his annual tapes had prepared her for this—this *place*, let alone the kind of trouble the skull clearly boded.

In what other ways might her father have changed. . . ?

SHE GLANCED AT the timepiece on the wall, and felt overwhelmingly confused. There was a word for it, but it wouldn't come to her: the sensation experienced by a world-traveller moving from one way of keeping time to another. The starship had kept Earth-standard time: twenty-four hours each divided into sixty minutes. Phoenix had a rotation period of just over twenty-five hours—but the clock on her bedroom wall was a standard twelve-hour clock. It said 5:47. She picked up her electronic chronometer from the dresser-counter where she'd laid it upon undressing: 12:03 AM said the digital face. It had been set for ship's time. No wonder she felt tired and confused. This had

already been a long and unsettling day—and it was far from over. *Dinner, yet!* She slipped the chronometer onto her wrist and, after a moment's hesitation, reset it to agree with the clock on the wall.

Dinner was to be at 6:15, her father had said: "Put on something nice—not too dressy, mind you, but nice," he'd said. "We'll be having one or two guests." Now what did he expect her to put on? A big grin? Without her luggage—

Startled by a thought, she crossed the bedroom to a mirrored wall—*Mirrors, everywhere in this damned place, but—*pushed the first tall mirrored panel aside, and confronted a closet.

Filled with clothes.

Her breath sucked in and she stared for a long moment without touching anything. Then she impulsively plucked one garment from its hanger and held it up against herself. It was gauzy and pale green, and fell from her neck to her ankles. She threw it over her head and let it settle against her body, then pirouetted before another mirrored panel. It felt totally insubstantial, its lightness making its every movement against her body a sensuous caress—but in appearance it was in no way indecent, she decided.

Other mirrored panels slid aside to reveal yet more. Rugged hiking outfits. Footwear of every variety. Drawers of delicately made underthings, as well as one

drawer of items for personal hygiene. Even a hair-dresser, newer than the one she'd brought in her luggage! She put it to immediate use.

Time passed too quickly. She glanced at her chronometer: 6:12. Her eyes sought the wall clock for confirmation, and it read a little earlier. The difference didn't matter; she would have to hurry.

When she found her way to the dining room there were four others there in addition to her father. One of them was a native.

He was easily the most impressive figure in the room, even standing quite to one side, staring through the huge windows at the gardenscape that lay beyond. He wore few clothes, and those entirely below his waist: knee-briches and soft leather slippers, both hues of brown. His own skin was a deep reddish tan. His hair fell half way down his chest, gold so pale that it was almost white. But these were not what first drew her attention to him. That feature which made him a most singularly arresting sight was his wings.

Feathered with the same shade of pale gold as his hair, the man's wings, folded, reached an arm's length higher than his head while their tips brushed the floor. Sprouting from points on his back analogous to human shoulder blades, his wings curved around him like a ceremonial cloak, yet did not hang easily in repose but fluttered and moved with his

movements with a life of their own.

She had only a moment to observe him unnoticed. Then her father's voice boomed out in introduction and the winged man, like the others in the room, turned to stare at her.

For a moment she thought their eyes had locked and her heart froze; then she realized his glance was sweeping her, head to foot, and she felt a rush of foolishness and annoyance with herself. She had, after all, seen pictures of the winged men of this planet, both in flight and at rest. Why had this one so surprised her? Was it the fact of his presence *here*—in her father's home?

Her thoughts still whirling in confusion, she let her father introduce her to the others. There was a man and woman whose names she entirely missed, but she gathered the man worked for her father in an executive position and the woman was his wife. He said almost nothing that evening, while his wife chattered good-natured inconsequentialities. There was another woman, handsome and middle-aged, whom her father introduced as "Marietta, my secretary," with a wink which brought a flush of anger to her face in response. She could not avoid comparing the woman unfavorably with her mother. But her attention centered upon her father's almost awkward introduction of the winged man.

"Ah, this is, um, *Syr Achelli*

Zyd. Syr Zyd is an, um, Archivist—that is to say, a leader among, ahh, Archivists here on Phoenix."

Zyd bowed his head—nodded it, really—at her without changing his expression of implacability. But he spoke to her quite perfectly, without a trace of accent: "I am pleased to meet the daughter of *Syr Broneta*. Your father does me great honor."

The meal which followed was anticlimactic despite the abundance and variety of the dishes. She found herself seated between her father and the executive who said little except to ask her occasionally for a dish. Her father, in turn, spent most of his time talking to his secretary. Table conversation was desultory in any case, despite the efforts at small talk of the executive's wife, perhaps because of the presence of the winged man, whose own contributions were confined to polite replies to direct questions.

Thankfully, the food was good enough to claim most of her attention, and after the last course was cleared away she felt both full and exhausted. At the earliest moment she made her excuses and headed back to her own apartment of rooms, determined to put an end to the day in sleep.

She didn't hear his soft footsteps on the thickly carpeted corridor floor; his voice, close behind her, startled her:

"Excuse me, *Syra Broneta* . . ."

Halting, she whirled, her first

emotion surprise to find the winged man so close by. "I'm sorry," she said, fighting the tremor that threatened to creep into her chilled voice. "I'm retiring now. I've had an exhausting day." But she waited, transfixed by his closeness, curious to know what he wanted. Up close his skin seemed to shine and his narrow face seemed softer—almost feminine.

"I know you must be tired," was his reply, "but I wonder if your fatigue might not be overcome by your first sight of nightfall here. 'Sunset,' I believe you call it. It is occurring just now."

"Really?" She found herself smiling up at him. "That might be nice." *I can put off going to bed for a few more moments.*

"I am told that offworlders find our 'sunsets' spectacular," the winged man added as he guided her to one of the terrace doors.

She had already noticed the redness of the sky beyond the glass door, but had attributed it to the alien light which bathed the planet. Now, stepping out into a broader view on the terrace garden, she realized how wrong her casual assumption had been. "Spectacular"—it was all of that!

The entire western horizon seemed bathed in flames, great solar flares leaping high into the darkening sky, while along the horizon itself the red sun showed only a squashed arc, glowing so brightly that it was hard to believe the edge of the world was

not itself on fire. She raised her eyes to the sky overhead: it was purple and here and there the brighter stars were visible, although she had to let her eyes readjust to see them. When she returned her gaze to the sunset it momentarily dazzled her, although the sun itself was nearly gone from sight—its flares still leapt high into full view, great twisting jets of atomic fire. Spectacular, yes—but awesomely frightening as well. Without thinking, she moved closer to her companion.

"I—I've never seen anything like it," she said. Then, self-deprecatingly, "I suppose everyone says that . . ."

His touch on her arm was electrifying—but he was only guiding her further out onto the terrace. "There is an interesting electrical effect visible in the southern part of the sky," he said as they moved toward a less obstructed view.

She was marvelling at the shimmering veils of color in the darkening sky when one of his hands fastened roughly over her mouth and his other arm came around her to seize her: "Make no sound," he hissed in her ear.

His grip was like iron; it rendered her helpless. Moving now with intense speed, he thrust her ahead into the gathering dusk, away from the house. His hand not only clamped her mouth shut, it almost blocked her nose as well; she could barely breathe.

Once down off the terrace, he threw her to the ground, wresting both her hands behind her while a knee in her back kept her pinned to the ground. Her mouth, freed, had filled with dust on her first choking intake of breath, and she felt too dazed and benumbed by the swift turn of events to struggle as she knew she should. A helpless lassitude came over her, and, unwillingly, she surrendered herself to capture.

She felt her wrists being bound together with a harsh rope; the tightness with which he tied them drove all sensation from her hands but a numbing sense of coldness. Then he yanked her head up with his fist in her hair and thrust something dry and fuzzy and too large into her mouth, securing it with more rope as a gag. The rope bit into the corners of her mouth and the back of her neck; he was not gentle with her.

Why is he doing this to me? was her despairing thought, but an image of the skull in her father's Saber flashed in her mind then, and her next thought was to wonder why her father had invited this winged man to be a guest in his house.

But it was not easy to maintain her thoughts as he pulled her roughly to her feet and thrust her into a stumbling run into the darkness, his grip on her arm never loosening.

They quickly left the carefully tended grounds behind, her inadequately shod feet bruised and

torn by the harsh footing of the arid land beyond. The sun had set now and only a red glow remained near the western horizon; it was too dark to see where she was going and the ground fell away and rose in shallow shelves on which she repeatedly stumbled. There was little vegetation, although the tight grip on her arm pulled her to one side or the other as they dodged half-glimpsed shrubs from time to time. Underfoot the ground was dry and bare, sometimes thick with dust and sometimes loosely rocky.

She felt herself trapped in a surreal nightmare, running, always running, tripping, never falling because of the wrenching grip on her arm that always kept her upright, choking for breath, mouth full of dust and grit, face tear-steaked, heart pounding, exhausted, and yet running—always running—

When he pulled her to a stop she could not at first believe it. Then, his grip for once relaxed, her legs folded and she collapsed on the ground, too spent to care where she was now, or what would come next.

III

THE LAND formed a natural bowl here, and in its center was a cairn of rocks. Across the sky glowed a broad band of light: the central galactic cluster. Under its light were gathered eight winged men. At a word from Zyd two of them

stooped and lifted the human female from the ground. Then they left the bowl and continued in a south-westerly direction.

SHE REGAINED HER SENSES to find herself on a narrow bed set within an alcove of hewn rock. The gag was no longer in her mouth although she could still taste it. Her arms, she discovered with some surprise, were lying at her sides, unbound. When she tried to move them, they felt heavy, lifeless. She tried, clumsily, to massage her wrists and was rewarded with the first pin-pricks of sensation.

Of the room beyond she could see little in the gloom, but other eyes were sharper than hers:

"Ah, *Syra Broneta*—you are awake . . ."

His voice was soft, caressing, yet tinged with sardonicism.

She pushed herself up into a sitting position, her arms now full of pain. "Where am I?" she asked. "Why have you brought me here?" The words seemed foolish to her as she voiced them; she knew that what had happened to her would be considered unforgivable by her father—and most likely by the other humans on Phoenix—and that Zyd must surely know this. That she might be allowed to escape with her life to return to her father, then, was unlikely—and the realization chilled her.

The winged man's response confirmed her fear: "It is not im-

portant for you to know these things, little flower. You are but a talisman, a . . . 'catalyst', is that your word? Events will begin to move now—your role is finished."

He moved closer, and quite suddenly she realized that the chill she felt was not fear alone: her dress, thin and insubstantial when first she donned it, was now torn into gauzy rags and this place of stone was not warm. Suddenly his hand darted out and touched the bare skin of her upper breast. She shivered and pulled back, but could retreat no further than the corner of the bed alcove.

"You are—cold?" he whispered.

"Yes—no—" she stammered in confusion. "Please—?"

"They say you humans can be made to burn with passion," he said. "I, believe I should like that."

"No—!"

His hand lashed out and the slap whipped her head to one side, leaving a stinging imprint on her cheek. "Do not argue with me, human *bistra*! I will have you—now!"

It was a graceless rape, brutal and direct, and it kindled no fires of passion within her—only the growing cold determination to avenge herself against this alien creature for the indignities he visited upon her.

Mammalian and humanoid, the natives of Phoenix were physically equipped to mate with humans, the proportions of their sex organs differing too little to be remarked

upon. But their "love-making" technique, if Zyd was typical, was crude and direct and copulatory—he made no effort to arouse her and treated her solely as an object for his own brief gratification.

While he was still upon her she found herself noticing small details—that he was beardless, his chin and cheek, buried against her neck, were skin-smooth; his breath when he raised his head up to look down at her face was fetid with tooth decay. His wings, so soft in appearance, felt stiff and harsh, the edges of their feathers almost sharp enough to cut her skin when they rubbed against her. His hands pinned her arms at her side, and his movements lacked the fluid grace she had expected: he pumped against her jerkily, hurriedly, as though driven compulsively. She wondered if there was any chance of pregnancy, but then dismissed the thought; their races were not close enough for that.

He used her, and when he was done with her he withdrew while she stared at him through slitted eyes and without expression. He in turn stared down at her, his own expression curiously troubled—then turned, reached out beyond the alcove for a curtain she had not known was there, and swept it across to leave her staring into darkness.

Sudden dizziness overwhelmed her. Her body ached. She felt soiled and abused. But the first

smoldering embers of hatred had consumed her fear. She stared into the darkness for she knew not how long, listening to the small sounds from beyond the curtain that told her of the presence of Zyd or others of the winged people, and then, without wanting to, she fell asleep.

IV
WHEN SHE AWOKE it was to darkness, and she had no awareness of the time until it occurred to her to look at her wrist chronometer. The glowing red digits told her it was 3:52 AM. Was it still the same night, then? Or another? Her arm ached; she let it fall back to the bed. Movement produced new sensations of ache and pain throughout her body: she felt stiff all over. If it was the same night, then she had slept for only a few hours. The lure of more sleep was hard to resist, but she fought against it, listening for sounds beyond the curtain that shielded her bed in its alcove. She heard nothing. All was still.

Cautiously, carefully, she pulled back one side of the curtain. The room beyond was in total darkness: impenetrably black. She felt a pang of apprehension: she knew nothing of this place—its layout, where it was, anything—how could she hope to escape it?

Suddenly a light sprang up close by. When her eyes adjusted to it she saw it was a lamp, its rays a liquid red. Standing next to

it, regarding her somberly, was Zyd.

"You have awakened," he said.

Helplessly she replied only, "Yes," and would have let the curtain fall back, despairing, but he moved forward—a quick, darting movement of his hand—and caught it.

Bringing the lamp with him, he pushed aside the curtain and sat down upon the edge of the bed. She tried to move away from him, but there was little room in which to avoid him.

"I think we must talk a little, you and I," he said.

"Oh, really?" she said, mustering some spirit into her voice.

"I feel perhaps I owe you that," he said.

"Have you been waiting up for me, just to talk to me?"

"I have."

She shook her head. "I don't understand you people at all."

"Nor do you know us."

"I know *you*—as well as I care to, thank you just the same."

"Perhaps I should apologize to you, *Syra* Broneta. You have been ill-used."

That evoked a bitter half-smile from her, her lips twisting to mock him. "Perhaps you should, *Syr* Zyd. You have, after all, only abducted me from my father's house, abused me, and raped me. Yes, apologies *are* in order, aren't they?" But her mind churned as she spoke: *What's this bastard up to, anyway?*

"Your abduction was planned

long ago, *Syra*, and for that I do not apologize. That is the way of things and if you must place blame, do so with your father, upon whom much blame rests. I apologize only for what I did here this night—that was wrong, and I admit it. I am haunted by my error and I have remained here, awake, to atone for it."

"Go on."

"Standards of, ahh, beauty, do not differ greatly between our races. It is not difficult for a *syrd* like myself to respond to your attractiveness. But I think you do not know much about the relations between our people and yours." His voice took on a new earnestness as he continued:

"There is much that we resent about the coming of your kind—the colonializing of our world, the shameless exploitation of our people . . . These are obvious to all who know us. But there are more subtle crimes that have been committed against us—and one of these is the perversion of our values, our esthetics, our entire culture by you humans in your exploitation of our people. You have held yourselves up to us for three generations, now, as superior models. You have molded our perceptions against our will. You have taught us—"

"Hold on a moment!" she interrupted. "I have done nothing of the sort! I've been here on your crazy planet for less than one day, and—"

He silenced her with a grim

look. "I speak your language well, I have been told—I learned it as a nestling. Do not play at words with me! I speak not of *you*, singular, but of your race, your kind: humankind. Now, let me finish." He paused, let out his pent-up breath in a sigh, and added, his tone almost contrite, "I am lecturing you, and that is no way to tender an apology. Let me continue—I want you to understand.

"You—your kind—have held yourselves up before us as an ideal. Our females are not without beauty and our songs have celebrated that beauty for a thousand *decas*. But our people are not evolved as yours—though we arrive at this time at a common appearance—and our females though they nurse their young do so from breasts which are nearly as flat as mine. Our nestlings come from their mothers in eggs which grow, expand, before hatching—and thus our females' hips are as narrow as my own. Once, you know, we flew—even as adults, not merely as nestlings—and our bones are light, hollow, our bodies carrying no waste weight. Thus, there are differences. And your kind have flaunted these differences at us, mocked up in subtle ways because our females lacked the voluptuous curves which adorn the bodies of your own women—which adorn your own body . . ." He stopped, almost as if in confusion.

"I am not making myself clear,"

he said, although she thought he was in fact making himself quite clear; she could anticipate what he would say next. "Against our will, we have come to find our own females drab, unexciting, less alluring, less *ideal* than human women. And yet—we are forbidden contact with you . . . your women. We—I—find this, have found this, most frustrating.

"Physical contact with you—the nearness of you and your near nakedness—it, it was too much for me. I . . . lost control. I am sorry. It should not have happened. I am . . . shamed."

Each regarded the other in silence. Then she spoke. "Do you take women of your own kind the same way you did me?"

His mask-like face seemed to soften, although in the crimson light she could not be sure. "No," he said. "Lovemaking among our people is an art. Some have compared it to the aerial mating dance of the *fuutchzy* birds that live in milder climes. Some believe we ourselves once mated in the air . . ." his voice drifted off.

"Why did you do it, then?" she asked, feeling anger return. "Do you hate us *that* much?"

He bowed his head. "Perhaps so; I do not know. I was possessed by a rage."

"It can't have been so wonderful for you, then—after all . . ." she said.

"No," he agreed. "It was not. It was the act of an animal, no more."

Suddenly she felt an emotion she'd not expected: pity. *Poor winged bastard—it sure didn't live up to his expectations!*

"I have been filled with remorse," he said. "With contempt for myself. It was an unworthy act. I could not sleep afterwards."

As she stared at him, she felt something wet on her cheek. His eyes found it as well.

"You weep," he said.

"I don't know why," she said, furiously brushing the tear away with a loose fragment of her once-dress.

"You are not much like your father," he observed. "Not what I expected."

"What did you expect?"

"Someone, ahh, different. More like the humans. I have known here."

"Different, in what way?"

"Harder, perhaps. Arrogant. Abusive at times—contemptuous."

"Is that how you see my father?"

"Yes."

"I don't. I think I am very much like my father. I idolized him as a child. I wanted to be as much like him as I could—think like him, feel as he did . . ."

"And when did you last see your father—before yesterday?"

"Eight years—" she stopped. "He's changed. Is that what you're saying?"

"I do not know. I never knew your father then. I have known him only for the past three *decas*.

I have no idea if he has changed. But I know him for what he is now."

"Arrogant and abusive?"

"And more. Cruelly exploitive. Did you observe the servants who served the meal?"

She shook her head. "Not really."

"Did you notice them to the extent of remarking upon their race?"

"I, uh, I guess I assumed they were humans." They hadn't had wings. "We come in a variety of, umm, races you know—different colors, different proportions . . ."

"They were natives of this world."

"They what?"

"Your people are very clever. They have found ways to tamper with the nestling while it is still in its egg. The nestling is born wingless."

She was shocked. "But—that's—"

"Periodically your humans go on raiding parties to other continents, to lands where our people are less advanced, culturally. There they raid the nests, stealing the eggs. They bring the eggs back to hatcheries, vast places where they treat the eggs and hatch them. The wingless nestlings are fed and raised to servitude, ignorant of their own origins, conditioned to their roles by their environment and education—such as it is.

"How do you think your father has accumulated such vast wealth

in this barren place?" His voice had climbed into the stridency of anger. "His is one of the largest hatcheries! He does not even take responsibility for raising the poor lost nestlings—he sells them, newly hatched, to dormitories elsewhere. He ships them out in boxes—!"

"Oh, my god," she whispered.

It all made sense—a terrible kind of sense. *The skull in the Saber—"labor problems" indeed!* The inexplicable changes in her father—

"But I don't understand how he could have changed so much," she cried. "He was a sweet and gentle man, a good father to me . . . a kind man who wouldn't harm even a mouse. This—these hatcheries—that's *inhuman!*"

"Indeed," he said, the sardonic note back in his voice. "To your kind we *are* inhumans, unhuman, not-human."

"No, I mean to do such a thing—it goes against all that we believe in!"

"I wish I could believe you," he said, sadly. "But I know better. It is done. It was kept from us for a long time. We were told they were from another world, imported by your kind to serve them. There was no scar where the wings might have been. Despite their resemblance to us, we were fooled for a long time. We did not even *want* to believe what was being done." He shrugged. "When the race is not one's own, it is easier to overlook its exploita-

tion. We too are less than perfect."

"How did you find out?"

"By chance. One of them escaped into the desert. He died. We found his corpse—little was left but the bones . . . and they were unmistakable. They were the bones of a *syrd*—a wingless *syrd*. The belt-buckle under the corpse identified it as the property of Allied Factoring—a major mining and smelting company. It was a puzzle—a major puzzle. I was called in as an Archivist—a scholar, in your terms. It was then we began watching the 'exploratory missions' that went out every so often, supposedly mapping and surveying our world, searching for mineral deposits and other geological features of interest." His voice satirized the words. "It took time, but we found out what they were doing."

"And what are you going to do about it?" she asked.

"We have already begun."

"By kidnapping me?"

"By no means you alone, but you were an important catch, yes. Your father is a very important man in this. I believe he helped improve the techniques for tampering with the growth of the nestlings. They are not only wingless, you know—they achieve full growth, maturity, in only ten years. And die after another ten."

"How awful," she breathed. Then, "So you have kidnapped me. What next?"

He stared at her sadly. "It has

been planned to send you back to him—a piece at a time.” He rushed on with the explanation: “Terrorism; we have studied your history. First demoralize the leaders, then raise up the people against them. In this case, the wingless ones. Even now we slip among them, whispering the truth . . .”

She felt chilled again and hugged herself in fear, hardly hearing his explanation of their tactics. *It has been planned to send you back to him—a piece at a time.* The words echoed in her mind.

“Now—” he said, “now, I do not know. I cannot be responsible for this happening to you.”

V

“**W**HAT CAN you do?” she asked. “He has already done too much,” said a voice from the room beyond.

Zyd whirled and the lamp, balanced upon the bed, was swept to the floor by his wing, smashing and going out. “Zyle!” he cried, and she felt him go with a sudden sense of loss.

Another light sprang up in the room and she saw the two winged men facing each other. “Zyle, my brother—!” Zyd cried again, his voice betraying guilt.

“Call me not ‘brother,’ ” said the other. Then he spoke in their own language and the words were indistinguishable to her except in tone. Zyd’s voice was conciliatory; his brother’s angry, a whiplash of emotion. The air between them

became charged as each began opening and closing his wings and they became, in the deep red light, larger than life, their shadows magnified on the walls behind them—bird-creatures, birds of prey, circling each other in anger, each awaiting, in her imagination, an opening through which to strike.

Then, suddenly, with an explosive epithet, Zyle’s hand snaked out to catch Zyd on his ear with a blow that rocked his head.

She caught her breath, but all was still—each had become motionless. Zyd, raising a hand to his ear, folded his wings and turned his back. Zyle, with a baleful glance in her direction, left the room.

Zyd busied himself cleaning up the fragments of the broken lamp, his eyes never turning in her direction, even when he faced her. She held her tongue until her curiosity had grown beyond control. “What has happened?” she asked in a small voice.

Zyd looked at her then, his expression remote. “My brother has challenged me to combat—to the death.”

“But—why?”

“I would rather not say.”

“It’s because of me, isn’t it?”

He sighed, a very human sigh, and said “Yes, Syra Broneta. It is because of you.”

“I don’t—”

“He was not pleased to find me talking to you here . . . as we were. He imagined more than

was true." *How delicately he phrases it*, she thought. "I was obliged to enlighten him. He cared for the truth even less. He feels I have brought shame upon us all." He shrugged. "Perhaps he is right."

"What will you do?"

"Meet him."

"And—?"

"Defend myself, if not my honor."

"Have you no choice?"

"None."

THE RED SUN had only half-risen when they assembled at the rim of the bowl in which at the center stood the cairn of rocks. She recognized it in the fiery blood-streaked light of dawn, and a shudder passed through her. This time she was unbound, but she was surrounded by winged men who regarded her with barely concealed hostility. She wondered if they held her to blame for the conflict about to occur—or whether their hostility was simply for all humankind. Well, she could hardly blame them in either case, could she?

Zyd left the group without a backward glance at her, and she realized that she was wishing—hoping—praying for his life to be spared. The irony did not escape her—only hours before she had prayed for vengeance upon him for his brutal rape of her and now it was all too likely to come. She watched as he descended the rim of the bowl to its center,

then, alerted by the watchful movements of the winged men who still surrounded her, she glanced across to the opposite rim, where another winged figure was descending.

Both wore only the simplest garments—brief breechclouts, ceremonial boots, and (the one note of ostentation) a jeweled belt from which was suspended a long dagger. Each carried a sword—more like a saber, if she remembered historical weaponry: broad-bladed and unwieldy in appearance—as each moved toward the stone cairn that stood between them.

She sensed that this place had witnessed many such battles, was indeed an ancient dueling place. Despite the growing heat of the day, she shivered under the rude garment (it had been a sheet) she wore. This place had known many deaths and today would know another. She had no stomach for it. But she would not turn away. She knew she must watch.

When each had reached the base of the cairn, they paused. Distant words, apparently ritual in nature, were exchanged. One of the winged men at her side spoke softly to her:

"They exchange their vows—that only one shall return."

"But—they're *brothers*!" she said, her voice choked with anguish.

"Brothers, yes," was the reply, "but their eggs were not nest-mates."

Below, the two winged men were climbing the cairn toward each other. She saw, suddenly, that perched atop the cairn was a round object—a shield? As they climbed, rocks turned under their feet, slipping and tumbling down to the pyramidal base. Once she saw Zyd falter, his wings opening wide to beat down against the air and steady him. He looked magnificent with his wings spread; she felt a thrill of pleasure at the sight.

Each crested the cairn at the same moment. Both reached out for the shield. Then, in a sudden flurry of movement too quick for her eye to follow, Zyle's sword thrust out, Zyd leapt back wings flapping, and Zyle had the shield on his other arm.

She felt very afraid then—afraid for Zyd and afraid for herself. Zyle was her avenger—but he would also be her doom, for he would stick to their original plan for her without compromise. Defending himself with the shield, he was now pressing his attack against Zyd, forcing the shieldless winged man back down the treacherous slope, his sword driving the other before him.

Then she gasped. Zyd had taken to the air! She had thought it impossible for the winged adults to fly, but Zyd had leapt into the air with a great thrust of his wings which seemed larger now than she had ever imagined them to be.

"His strategy is a clever one,"

said the one at her side who had spoken before. "It is exhausting, but he can fly for a short time. It will leave him without sustaining stamina for the fight, but it gives him the advantage for now."

"But what of his brother?" she asked. "Won't he fly too?"

"He cannot—the shield is too heavy. It would also unbalance him. See—!"

Zyle had raised his shield against the aerial attack of his brother, but in so doing lost his footing upon the rocks. Now he was falling, twisting, tumbling, his wings partly cushioning him against the rocks as he fell.

Zyd hesitated in the air at a moment when Zyle's back was exposed, but the moment had passed before he dived to attack.

She felt confusion: why hadn't he struck? But she didn't want him to kill his brother—she only wanted him to survive.

They were both at the foot of the cairn now, the footing clear but for an occasional tumbled stone, and each was on his feet. They circled, wings opening and closing spasmodically, the scene so exactly duplicating that of the night before that it startled her. As they moved out away from the cairn, the rising sun caught them in its rays, casting menacingly vast shadows before them.

Zyle fainted, then thrust, but Zyd neatly caught and deflected his sword with his own. She wondered if they practiced with these swords often; sword fights were

clearly ceremonial. Thus far their fight had consisted of a few fast movements and much watchful circling, and their movements had alternated between the clumsy and the expert. It was not what she, conditioned by media melodramas, had expected.

Zyd had apparently abandoned his flying tactics and was following a defensive strategy, parrying and deflecting his brother's swings and thrusts with his own sword. Metal rang upon metal, sometimes in resounding bell-like tones, sometimes as flat slaps. Still each circled the other, but Zyd, she saw, was retreating and Zyle advancing, the pattern of their movements written plain upon the dust.

"He maneuvers Zyd so that the light is in his eyes," murmured the winged man beside her. She saw that this was true: Zyd had backed almost to the near edge of the bowl where the sun's rays, clearing the opposite side of the bowl as it continued to rise into the sky, pinned him mercilessly. He raised his hand against it and seemed to falter, momentarily blinded.

Zyle seized the moment, raising his sword into a full swing, leaping forward, shield dropped at his side—

—and fell, his sword clattering against the ground, Zyd's sword—*Zyd's sword!*—impaled in his gut.

There was no applause, indeed no sound or movement from the

winged men around her. She stared, heart still in her mouth, still half-convinced because she had seen it about to happen, that it was Zyd, and not his brother, dead upon the floor of the bowl.

Zyd too stood motionless for a long moment, then stooped to take the shield from his fallen brother's arm. He turned and picked up also his brother's sword. Then, with movements that spoke more eloquently of defeat than victory, he trudged slowly across the floor to the cairn and climbed it laboriously until he reached its peak. There he forced the sword upright into the rocks and placed the shield against it. Then, unsmiling, he returned down the cairn and across the level ground to his brother's body.

She watched it all with a growing sense of dread.

VI.
A KEENING WAIL caught her ear and at first she thought it was another ritual sound of the winged men, but as it rose to a whine she turned and saw dropping down from the sky a large GMW, only a few hundred meters above the surface of the ground and coming in fast.

The others heard it too, and upon sighting it leapt down the inner slope of the bowl, scrambling quickly, wings flailing, to keep their balance and escape the machine.

But it did not pursue them.

The vehicle—she saw it was a four-door model, unlike her father's—slowed to a stop and settled to the ground almost directly in front of her. She could smell the ozone from the field-generators, and feel her hair standing out in every direction from her scalp. The air seemed to almost crackle around her. Then the whine died and the door of the GMW popped open as Paul Rheems jumped out, a hand-laser pointing in the direction of the fleeing winged men.

Thinking he was about to shoot, she ran to interpose her body between him and the others and cried out, "Don't shoot—*please don't shoot!*"

But he let the weapon drop and ran to her, saying in a tone of voice she'd never heard him use before, "Are you all right, Miss Broneta? Good! Let's get going—jump in!" and gesturing to the open door of the GMW.

"But—" she stood, locked in indecision.

"Don't worry about them—they're in no trouble! But we will be, if we don't get back to the shuttlepod before liftoff—*come on!*" He grabbed her wrist and yanked her after him with an authority new to him.

Yielding, but no less confused by this unexpected new turn, she let him help her up into the rear passenger seat of the aircar, which promptly lifted with a screech into the bloody-fingered sky.

SHE WAS GRATEFUL for the complex liftoff procedures aboard the shuttlepod. The time she spent between the two inflated cushions that held her during the acceleration was time she could spend with her own thoughts, trying to find sense and order among them.

She had spent less than a day on the planet Phoenix and yet it would change her life. Her only physical souvenirs of the world were a body's worth of aches, cuts and bruises and a particular soreness when she walked. Rheems had rescued her held-up luggage from somewhere and from that she had found clothes to wear but somehow she had lost the sheet she'd worn in place of her destroyed dress, her father's gift . . . She tried not to think of her father. It was easier to think him long dead, as in fact the man she had known as her father had been, his body a hollow shell filled with insanity.

That was the hard part: trying to understand the insanity.

"It's this sun—the first colonists called it the Mad Sun, and they didn't know how right they were," Rheems had told her. "Human eyes can't adjust to its light—the mind loses some kind of essential control. After a while it gives up. It's a subtle thing, and I'm sure it will be a long time before they have all the clinical facts . . ." his voice trailed off for a moment. "If they ever do," he continued. "People aren't guinea pigs, after all. Once this gets out,

I doubt anyone will ever come here again."

"What about those *already* here?" she had asked.

"Those who were newcomers, like ourselves, are being evacuated immediately. The others will have to take their chances with the uprising. It's too late to help them."

"How can you *say* that? How can you be so callous? What about people like my father?"

"Miss Broneta, people like your father, if they left this planet, would surely be brought before a tribunal for unlawful tampering with another sentient race—oh, we know all about that, now. But, more to the point, he—and they—have suffered permanent brain damage. We've had so very little time to try to establish the basic facts, but that much we already know. That's what brought me here, you know—a family returned from Phoenix on the last starflight. They were the first returnees and naturally we were careful to quarantine them for routine checks. We began to suspect almost immediately that something was wrong. Their responses to stimuli were not natural. Their emotional responses were almost entirely self-centered to the point of unbelievability. They were concerned primarily with self-gratification, in every sense. They were completely unable to cope with a non-Phoenix environment, and each of them died—apparently of

cerebral hemorrhages—within a few months of their return. Autopsies were ordered, and the results were astonishing. That's when we were sent to Phoenix."

"We?"

"I'm an officer of the Transworld Security Council, Miss Broneta. I'm sorry I had to appear otherwise to you at the time. I'm sure I was most tiresome."

"In any case, there is no hope for your father—even if we evacuated him now, on this shuttle."

"And you say the *red sun* caused all this, this insanity?"

"Yes. Don't ask me how. Part of it's psychological, a response to the, ah, 'wrong' colors. Part is physiological—resulting from stress to the optic nerves, perhaps. There may be other aspects—perhaps unsuspected radiation. Not everyone reacts to it as extremely as the family we first encountered—they'd been on the planet for a great many years, and the children were native-born. But we know now that to a degree the light is addicting. Did you notice the lenses many were wearing? They use red lighting within their homes, too. They attune themselves to it."

"You certainly showed up in the proverbial nick of time out there in the desert."

"We were looking for you. Your father had received a message that you'd been kidnapped. We began fanning out, searching for you. The pilot found that strange

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geological formation on his map and it looked worth checking out—and there you were. Lucky, huh?"

"Were you looking for me because I'd been kidnapped—?"

"No, because we'd done the necessary local work to establish the danger of any new arrivals remaining here, and we were rounding them all up. Then we heard about the Uprising, and that added urgency. When your father told us—"

"What was his reaction? Did he try to get in touch with anyone before—?"

"He seemed almost totally unconcerned. It has not been an uncommon reaction among the others who have received similar messages, I find."

And that had disturbed her the most. *Unconcerned!* I wonder how he would've felt when the first piece of me arrived?

own emotions swinging more wildly than perhaps you're used to?" he had asked her; but there was no way she could answer that question.

She still remembered the last thing he had said to her. She had asked him if the human abandonment of Phoenix would mean the success of the Uprising, and he had said, half-sadly, half-callsously, "Yeah, we're leaving the planet to the natives, and they're welcome to it, poor bastards."

Poor bastards. Poor Zyd, who had slain his brother—over a fruitless dispute, the consequences of which would now remain forever unknown to her. Poor bastards: The wingless ones, raised to servitude and doomed to die after too brief a lifespan to be meaningful.

Poor bastards: her father and all the rest of them, doomed to madness under the blood-red sun.

GEORGE R.R. MARTIN

George Martin's last story for us, "Run to Starlight" (December, 1974), won kudos from the readership for its fresh handling of an unusual combination—the sports story and sf. Now he returns with a scenerio for the downfall of the United States of America which is entirely believable . . .

Illustrated by LAURENCE KAMP

THE ANNOUNCEMENT came during prime time.

All four major holo networks went off simultaneously, along with most of the independents. There was an instant of crackling grayness. And then a voice, which said, simply, "Ladies and gentlemen, the President of the United States."

John Hartmann was the youngest man ever to hold the office of President, and the commentators were fond of saying that he was the most telegenic as well. His clean-cut good looks, ready wit, and flashing grin had given the Liberty Alliance its narrow plurality in the bitter four-way elections of 1984. His political acumen had engineered the Electoral College coalition with the Old Republicans that had put him in the White House.

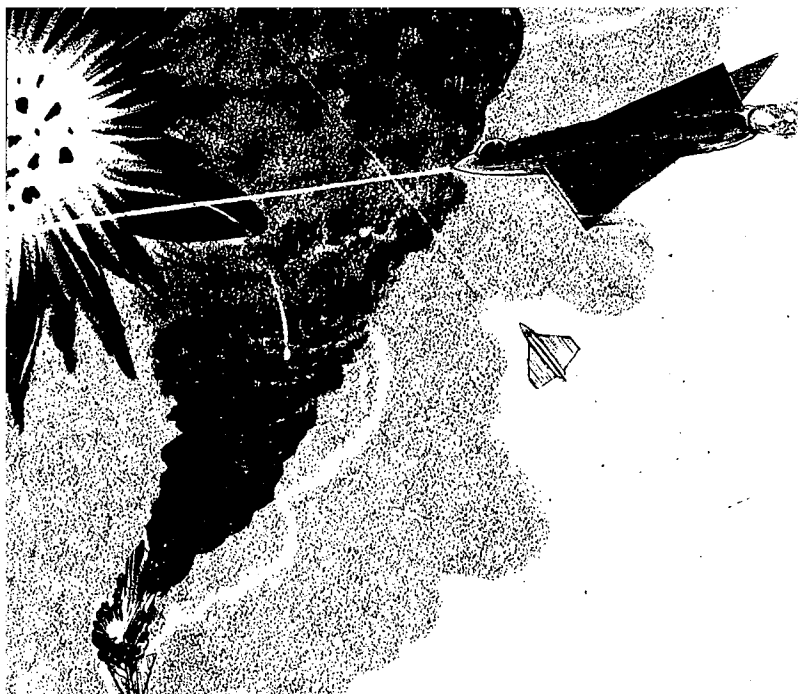
Hartmann was not grinning now. His features were hard, somber. He was sitting behind his desk in the Oval Office, looking

down at the papers he held in his hands. After a moment of silence, he raised his head slowly; and his dark eyes looked straight out into the living rooms of a nation.

"My fellow countrymen," he said gravely, "tonight our nation faces the most serious crisis in its long and great history. Approximately one hour ago, an American air force base in California was hit by a violent and vicious attack . . ."

THE FIRST CASUALTY was a careless sentry. The attacker was quick, silent, and very efficient. He used a knife. The sentry died without a whimper, never knowing what was happening.

The other attackers were moving in even before the corpse hit the ground. Circuits were hooked up to bypass the alarm system, and torches went to work on the high electric fence. It fell. From the darkness, more invaders materialized to move through the fresh gap.



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But somewhere one alarm system was still alive. Sirens began to howl. The sleepy airbase came to sudden, startled life. Stealth now useless, the attackers began to run. Towards the airfields.

Somebody began to fire. Someone else screamed. Outside the main gate, the guards looked in, baffled, towards the base. A stream of submachine gun fire took them where they stood, hammering them to bloody death against the their own fence. A grenade arced through the air, and the gate shattered under the explosion.

"THE ATTACK was sudden, well-planned, and utterly ruthless," Hartmann told the nation. "The defense, under the circumstances, was heroic. Nearly one hundred American servicemen died during the course of the action."

THE POWER LINES were cut only seconds after the attack got underway. A well-placed grenade took out the emergency generator. Then darkness. It was a moonless night, and the clouds obscured the stars. The only light was the flash of machine gun fire and the brief, shattering brilliance of the explosions around the main gate.

There was little rhyme and less reason to the defense. Startled by the sirens, troops scrambled from the barracks and towards the gate, where the conflict seemed to be centered. On either side of the

fence, attackers and defenders hit the ground. A searing crossfire was set up.

The base commandant was as startled and confused as any of his men. Long, valuable minutes passed while he and his staff groped for the facts, and tried to understand what was happening. Their response was almost instinctive. A ring of defenders was thrown around the Command Tower, a second around the base armory. Other men were sent sprinting towards the planes.

But the bulk of the troops were rushed to the main gate, where the battle was at its fiercest.

The defenders brought up heavy weapons from the base armory. The shrubbery outside the base perimeter was blasted by mortars, blown apart by grenades. The attackers' hidden position was systematically pounded. Then, behind a wall of smoke and tear-gas, the defenders poured out of the gate, washed over the enemy positions.

They found them empty, but for corpses. The attackers had melted away as suddenly as they had come.

An order for search and pursuit was swiftly given. And just as swiftly rescinded. For over the machine gun fire and the explosions, another sound could now be heard.

The sound of a jet taking off.

"THE ATTACKERS concentrated most of their forces against the

main entrance of the air base," Hartmann said. "But for all its fierceness, this assault was simply a diversion. While it was in progress, a smaller force of attackers penetrated another part of the base perimeter, beat off light resistance, and seized a small portion of the airfields."

The President's face was taut with emotion. "The goal of the attack was a squadron of long-range bombers, and their fighter escorts. As part of our first line of defense to deter Communist aggression, the bombers were on stand-by status; fueled and ready to take off in seconds, in the event of an enemy attack."

Hartmann paused dramatically, looked down at his papers, then back up. "Our men reacted swiftly and valiantly. They deserve only our praise. They retook several planes from the attackers, and burned down several others during takeoff."

"Despite this courageous resistance, however, the attackers put seven fighters and two bombers into the air. My fellow countrymen, both of those bombers were equipped with nuclear weaponry."

Again Hartmann paused. Behind him, the Oval Office background dissolved. Suddenly there was only the President, and his desk, outlined against a blank wall of white. On that wall, six familiar sentences suddenly appeared.

"Even while the attack was in progress, an ultimatum was sent

to me in Washington," Hartmann said. "Unless certain demands were met within a three-hour deadline, I was told, a hydrogen bomb would be dropped on the city of Washington, D.C. You see those demands before you." He gestured.

"Most of you have seen them before. Some call them the Six Demands," he continued. "I'm sure you know them as well as I. They call for an end to American aid to our struggling allies in Africa and the Mid-East, for the systematic destruction of our defensive capacities, for an end to the Special Urban Units that have restored law and order to our cities, for the release of thousands of dangerous criminals, for the repeal of federal restrictions on obscene and subversive literature, and, of course,—he flashed his famous grin—"for my resignation as President of the United States."

The grin faded. "These demands are a formula for national suicide, a recipe for surrender and disgrace. They would return us to the lawlessness and anarchy of a permissive society that we have left behind. Moreover, they are opposed by the great majority of the American people."

"However, as you know, these demands are vocally advocated by a small and dangerous minority. They represent the political program of the so-called American Liberation Front."

The background behind Hart-

mann changed again. The blowup of the Six Demands vanished. Now the President sat before a huge photograph of a bearded, long-haired young man in a black beret and baggy black uniform. The man was quite dead; most of his chest had been blown away.

"Behind me you see a photograph of one of the casualties of tonight's attack," Hartmann said. "Like all the other attackers we found, he wears the uniform of the paramilitary wing of the A.L.F."

The photo vanished. Hartmann looked grim. "The facts are clear. But this time the A.L.F. has gone too far. I will not submit to nuclear blackmail. Nor, my fellow countrymen, is there cause for alarm. To my fellow citizens of Washington I say especially, fear not. I promise that the A.L.F. pirate planes will be tracked down and destroyed long before they reach their target.

"Meanwhile, the leaders of the A.L.F. are about to learn that they erred in attempting to intimidate this administration. For too long they have divided and weakened us, and given aid and comfort to those who would like to see this nation enslaved. They shall do so no longer.

"There can be only one word for tonight's attack. That word is treason.

"Accordingly, I will deal with the attackers like traitors."

2.
"I'VE GOT THEM, McKinnis

said, his voice crackling with static. "Or something."

Reynolds didn't really need the information. He had them too. He glanced briefly down at the radar map. They were on the edge of the scope, several miles ahead, heading due east at about 90,000 feet. High, and moving fast.

Another crackle, then Bonetto, the flight leader. "Looks like them, alright. I've got nine. Let's go get 'em."

His plane nosed up and began to climb. The others followed, behind and abreast of him in a wide V formation. Nine LF-7 Vampyre fighter/interceptors. Red, white, and blue flags on burnished black metal, silvery teeth slung underneath.

A hunting pack closing for the kill.

Yet another voice came over the open channel. "Hey, whattaya figure the odds? All over they're looking. Betcha it gets us promotions. Lucky us."

That had to be Dutton, Reynolds thought. A brash kid, hungry. Maybe *he* felt lucky. Reynolds didn't. Inside the acceleration suit he was sweating suddenly, coldly.

The odds had been all against it. The kid was right about that. The Alfie bombers were LB-4s, laser-armed monsters with speed to spare. They could've taken any route of a dozen, and still make it to Washington on time. And every damn plane and radar installation in the country was look-

ing for them.

So what were the odds against them running into Reynolds and his flight out over northern Nebraska on a wild goose chase?

Too damn good, as it turned out.

"They see us," Bonetto said. "They're climbing. And accelerating. Move it."

Reynolds moved it. His Vampire was the last in one arm of the V, and it held its formation. Behind the oxygen mask, his eyes roamed restlessly, and watched the instruments. Mach 1.3. Then 1.4. Then higher.

They were gaining. Climbing and gaining.

The radar map showed the Alfie positions. And there was a blur up ahead on the infrared scope. But through the narrow eyeslit, nothing. Just cold black sky and stars. They were above the clouds.

The dumb bastards, Reynolds thought. They steal the most sophisticated hunk of metal ever built, and they don't know how to use it. They weren't even using their radar scramblers. It was almost like they were asking to be shot down.

Cracklings. "They're leveling off." Bonetto again. "Hold your missiles till my order. And remember, those big babies can give you a nasty hotfoot."

Reynolds looked at the radar map again. The Alfies were now flat out at about 100,000 feet. Figured. The LB-4s could go

higher, but ten was about the upper limit for the fighter escorts. Rapiers. Reynolds remembered his briefing.

They wanted to stick together. That made sense. The Alfies would need their Rapiers. Ten *wasn't* the upper limit for Vampyres.

Reynolds squinted. He thought he saw something ahead, through the eyeslit. A flash of silver. Them? Or his imagination? Hard to tell. But he'd see them soon enough. The pursuit planes were gaining. Fast as they were, the big LB-4s were no match for the Vampyres. The Rapiers were; but they had to stay with the bombers.

So it was only a matter of time. They'd catch them long before Washington. And then?

Reynolds shifted uneasily. He didn't want to think about that. He'd never flown in combat before. He didn't like the idea.

His mouth was dry. He swallowed. Just this morning he and Anne had talked about how lucky he was, made plans for a vacation. And beyond. His term was almost up, and he was still safe in the States. So many friends dead in the South African War. But he'd been lucky.

And now this. And suddenly the possibility that tomorrow might not be bright. The possibility that tomorrow might not be. It scared him.

There was more, too. Even if he lived, he was still queasy.

About the killing.

That shouldn't have bothered him. He knew it might happen when he enlisted. But it was different then. He thought he'd be flying against Russians, Chinese—enemies. The outbreak of the South African War and the U.S. intervention had disturbed him. But he could have fought there, for all that. The Pan-African Alliance was Communist-inspired, or so they said.

But Alfies weren't distant foreigners. Alfies were people, neighbors. His radical college roommate. The black kids he had grown up with back in New York. The teacher who lived down the block. He got along with Alfies well enough, when they weren't talking politics.

And sometimes even when they were. The Six Demands weren't all that bad. He'd heard a lot of nasty rumors about the Special Urban Units. And God knows what the U.S. was doing in South Africa and the Mid-East.

He grimaced behind the oxygen mask. Face it, Reynolds, he told himself. The skeleton in his closet. He had actually thought about voting A.L.F. in '84, although in the end he'd chickened out and pulled the lever for Bishop, the Old Democrat. No one on the base knew but Anne. They hadn't argued politics for a long time, with anyone. Most of his friends were Old Republicans, but a few had turned to the Liberty Alliance. And that scared

him.

Bonetto's crackling command smashed his train of thought. "Look at that, men. The Alfies are going to fight. At 'em!"

Reynolds didn't need to look at his radarmap. He could see them now, above. Lights against the sky. Growing lights.

The Rapiers were diving on them.

OF ALL the commentators who followed President Hartmann over the holo networks, Continental's Ted Warren seemed the least shell-shocked. Warren was a gritty old veteran with an incisive mind and razor tongue. He had tangled with Hartmann more than once, and was regularly denounced by the Liberty Alliance for his "Alfie bias."

"The President's speech leaves many questions still unanswered," Warren said in his post-mortem newscast. "He has promised to deal with the A.L.F. as traitors, but as yet, we are unsure exactly what steps will be taken. There is also some question, in my mind at any rate, as to the A.L.F.'s motivation for this alleged attack. Bob, any thoughts on that?"

A new face on camera; the reporter who covered A.L.F. activities for Continental had been hustled out of bed and rushed to the studio. He still looked a little rumpled.

"No, Ted," he replied. "As far as I know, the A.L.F. was not planning any action of this kind.

Were it not for the fact that this attack was so well-planned, I might question whether the A.L.F. national leadership was involved at all. It might have been an unauthorized action by a group of local extremists. You'll recall that the assault on the Chicago Police Headquarters during the 1985 riots was of this nature. However, I think the planning that went into this attack, and the armament that was used, precludes this being a similar case."

Warren, at the Continental anchordesk, nodded sagely. "Bob, do you think there is any possibility that the paramilitary arm of the A.L.F. might have acted unilaterally, without the knowledge of the party's political leaders?"

The reporter paused and looked thoughtful. "Well, it's possible, Ted. But not likely. The kind of assault that the President described would require too much planning. I'd think that the whole party would have to be involved in an effort on that scale."

"What reasons would the A.L.F. have for an action like this?" Warren asked.

"From what the President said, a hope that a nuclear threat would bring immediate agreement to the A.L.F.'s Six Demands would seem to be the reason."

Warren was insistent. "Yes. But why should the A.L.F. resort to such an extreme tactic? The latest Gallup poll gave them the support of nearly 29% of the electorate,

behind only the 38% of President Hartmann's Liberty Alliance. This is a sharp increase from the 13% of the vote the A.L.F. got in the presidential elections of 1984. With only a year to go before the new elections, it seems strange that the A.L.F. would risk everything on such a desperate ploy."

Now the reporter was nodding. "You have a point, Ted. However, we've been surprised by the A.L.F. before. They've never been the easiest party to predict, and I think—"

Warren cut him off. "Excuse me, Bob. Back to you later. Correspondant Mike Petersen is at the A.L.F.'s national headquarters in Washington, and he has Douglass Brown with him. Mike, can you hear me?"

The picture changed. Two men standing before a desk, one half slouched against it. Behind them, on the wall, the A.L.F. symbol; a clenched black fist superimposed over the peace sign. The reporter held a microphone. The man he was with was tall, black, youthful. And angry.

"Yes, Ted, we've got you," the reporter said. He turned to the black man. "Doug, you were the A.L.F. presidential candidate in 1984. How do you react to President Hartmann's charges?"

Brown laughed lightly. "Nothing that man does surprises me any more. The charges are vicious lies. The American Liberation Front had nothing to do with this so-called attack. In fact, I doubt

that this attack ever took place. Hartmann is a dangerous demagogue, and he's tried this sort of smear before."

"Then the A.L.F. claims that no attack took place?," Petersen asked.

Brown frowned. "Well, that's just a quick guess on my part, not an official A.L.F. position," he said quickly. "This has all been very sudden, and I don't really have the facts. But I'd say that was a possibility. As you know, Mike, the Liberty Alliance has made wild charges against us before."

"In his statement tonight, President Hartmann said he would deal with the A.L.F. as traitors. Would you care to comment on that?"

"Yeah," said Brown. "It's more cheap rhetoric. I say that Hartmann's the traitor. He's the one that has betrayed everything this country is supposed to stand for. His creation of the Special Suuies to keep the ghettos in line, his intervention in the South African War, his censorship legislation; there's your treason for you."

The reporter smiled. "Thank you, Doug. And now back to Ted Warren."

Warren reappeared. "For those of you who have flicked on late, a brief recap. Earlier this evening, an American air base in California was attacked, and two bombers and seven fighter planes were seized. The bombers were

equipped with nuclear weaponry, and the attackers have threatened to destroy Washington, D.C., unless certain demands are met within three hours. Only an hour-and-a-half now remain. Continental News will stay on the air until the conclusion of the crisis . . ."

3.

SOMEWHERE OVER western Illinois, Reynolds climbed towards ten, and sweated, and tried to tell himself that the advantages were all his.

The Rapiers were good planes. Nothing with wings was any faster, or more maneuverable. But the Vampyres had all the other pluses. Their missiles were more sophisticated, their defensive scramblers better. And they had their Vampyre fangs: twin gas-dynamic lasers mounted on either wing that could slice through steel like it was jello. The Rapiers had nothing to match that. The Vampyres were the first operational Laser/Fighters.

Besides, there were nine Vampyres and only seven Rapiers. And the Alfies weren't as familiar with their planes. They couldn't be.

So the odds were all with Reynolds. But he still sweated.

The arms of the V formation slowly straightened, as Reynolds and the other wingmen accelerated to come even with Bonetto's lead jet. In the radarmap, the Rapiers were already on top of

them. And even through the eye slit he could see them now, diving out of the black, their silver-white sides bright against the sky. The computer tracking system was locked in, the warheads armed. But still no signal from Bonetto.

And then, "Now." Sharp and clear.

Reynolds hit the firing stud, and missiles one and eight shot from beneath the wings, and etched a trail of flame up into the night. Parallel to his, others. Dutton, on his wing, had fired four. Eager for the kill.

Red/orange against black through the eyeslit. Black on red in the infrared scope. But all the same, really. The climbing streaks of flame that were the Vampyre missiles intersecting with a descending set. Crisscrossing briefly.

Then explosion. The Alfies had rigged one of theirs for timed detonation. A small orange fireball bloomed briefly. When it vanished, both sets of missiles were gone, save for one battered survivor from the Vampyre barrage that wobbled upward without hitting anything.

Reynolds glanced down. The radar map was having an epileptic fit. The Alfies were using their scramblers.

"Split," said Bonetto, voice crackling. "Scatter and hit them."

The Vampyres broke formation. Reynolds and Dutton pulled up and to the left, McKinnis dove.

Bonetto and most of his wing swung away to the right. And Trainor climbed straight on, at the diving Rapiers.

Reynolds watched him from the corner of his eye. Two more missiles jumped from Trainor's wings; then two more, then the final two. And briefly, the laser seared a path up from his wingtips. A futile gesture; he was still out of range.

The Rapiers were sleek silver birds of prey, spitting missiles. And suddenly, another fireball, and one of them stopped spitting.

But no time for cheering. Even as the Rapier went up, Trainor's Vampyre tried to swerve from the hail of Alfie missiles. His radar scrambler and heat decoys had confused them. But not enough. Reynolds was facing away from the explosion, but he felt the impact of the shock, and he could see the nightblack plane twisting and shattering in his mind.

Reynolds felt a vague pang, and tried to remember what Trainor had looked like. But there was no time. He twisted the Vampyre around in a sharp loop. Dutton flew parallel. They dove back towards the fight.

Far below a new cloud of flame blossomed. McKinnis, Reynolds thought, fleetingly, bitterly. He dove. The Alfies got on his tail. The goddamn Alfies.

But there was no way to be sure, no leisure to consider the question. Even a brief glance out the eye slit was a luxury; a

dangerous luxury. The infrared scope, the radarmap, the computer tracking systems all screamed for his attention.

Below him, two Alfies were swinging around. The computer locked on. His fingers moved as if by instinct. Missiles two and seven leapt from their launchers, towards the Rapiers.

A scream sounded briefly from his radio, mingled with the static and the sudden shrill cry of the proximity alarms. Something had locked on him. He activated the lasers. The computer found the incoming missile, tracked it, burned it from the sky when it got within range. Reynolds had never even seen it. He wondered how close it had come.

A flood of bright orange light washed through the eye slit as a Rapier went up in flame in front of him. His missile? Dutton's? He never knew. It was all he could do to pull the Vampyre up sharply, and avoid the expanding ball of fire.

There were a few seconds of peace. He was above the fight, and he took time for a quick glance at the infrared. A tangle of confused black dots on a red field. But two were higher than the rest. Dutton; with an Alfie on his tail.

Reynolds swung his Vampyre down again, came in above and behind the Rapier just as it was discharging its missiles. He was close. No need to waste the four missiles he had left. His hand

went to the lasers, fired.

Converging beams of light lanced from the black wingtips, to bite into the Rapier's silver fuselage on either side of the cockpit. The Alfie pilot dove for escape. But the Vampyre minicomputer held the lasers steady.

The Rapier exploded.

Almost simultaneously there was another explosion; the Alfie missiles, touched off by Dutton's lasers. Reynolds' radio came alive with Dutton's laughter, and breathless thanks.

But Reynolds was paying more attention to the infrared and the radarmap. The radar was clear again. Only three blips showed below him.

It was over.

Bonetto's voice split the cabin again. "Got him," he was yelling. "Got them all. Who's left up there?"

Dutton replied quickly. Then Reynolds. The fourth surviving Vampyre was Ranczyk, Bonetto's wingman. The others were gone.

There was a new pang, sharper than during the battle. It had been McKinnis after all, Reynolds thought. He'd known McKinnis. Tall, with red hair, a lousy poker player who surrendered his money gracefully when he lost. He always did. His wife made good chili. They'd voted Old Democrat, like Reynolds. Damn, damn, damn.

"We're only halfway there," Bonetto was saying. "The LB-4s are still ahead. Picked up some

distance. So let's go."

Four Vampyres weren't nearly as impressive in formation as nine. But they climbed. And gave chase.

TED WARREN looked tired. He had taken off his jacket and loosened the formal black scarf knotted around his neck, and his hair was mussed. But still he went on.

"Reports have been coming in from all over the nation on the sighting of the pirate planes," he said. "Most of them are clearly misidentifications, but no word has yet come from the administration on the hunt for the stolen jets, so the rumors continue to flow unabated. Meanwhile, barely an hour remains before the threatened nuclear demolition of Washington."

Behind him a screen woke to sudden churning life. Pennsylvania Avenue, with the Capitol outlined in the distance, was choked with cars and people. "Washington itself is in a state of panic," Warren commented. "The populace of the city has taken to the streets en masse in an effort to escape, but the resulting traffic jams have effectively strangled all major arteries. Many have abandoned their cars and are trying to leave the city on foot. Helicopters of the Special Urban Units have been attempting to quell the disturbances, ordering the citizens to return to their homes. And President Hartmann

himself has announced that he intends to set an example for the people of the city, and remain in the White House for the duration of the crisis."

The Washington scenes faded. Warren looked off-camera briefly. "I've just been told that Chicago correspondant Ward Emery is standing by with Mitchell Grinstein, the chairman of the A.L.F.'s Community Defense Militia. So now to Chicago."

Grinstein was standing outdoors, on the steps of a gray, fortress-like building. He was tall and broad, with long black hair worn in a pony tail and a drooping Fu Manchu mustache. His clothes were a baggy black uniform, a black beret, and an A.L.F. medallion on a length of rawhide. Two other men, similarly garbed, lounged behind him on the steps. Both carried rifles.

"I'm here with Mitchell Grinstein, whose organization has been accused of participating in this evening's attack on a California air base, and the hijacking of two nuclear bombers," Emery said. "Mitch, your reactions?"

Grinstein flashed a vaguely sinister smile. "Well, I only know what I see on the holo. I didn't order any attack. But I applaud whoever did. If this speeds up the implementation of the Six Demands, I'm all for it."

"Douglass Brown has called the charges of A.L.F. participation in this attack 'vicious lies,'" Emery continued. "He questions whether

any attack ever took place. How does this square with what you just said?"

Grinstein shrugged. "Maybe Brown knows more than I do. We didn't order this attack, like I said. But it could be that some of our men finally got fed up with Hartmann's fourth-rate fascism, and decided to take things into their own hands. If so, we're behind them."

"Then you think there *was* an attack?"

"I guess so. Hartmann had pictures. Even he wouldn't have the gall to fake *that*."

"And you support the attack?"

"Yeah. The Community Defenders have been saying for a long time that black people and poor people aren't going to get justice anywhere but in the streets. This is a vindication of what we've been calling for all along."

"And what about the position of the A.L.F.'s political arm?"

Another shrug. "Doug Brown and I agree on where we're going. We don't see eye to eye on how to get there."

"But isn't the Community Defense Militia subordinate to the A.L.F. political apparatus, and thus to Brown?"

"On paper. It's different in the streets. Are the Liberty Troopers subordinate to President Hartmann when they go out on freak-hunts and black busting expeditions? They don't act like it. The Community Defenders are committed to the protection of

the community. From thugs, Liberty Troopers, and Hartmann's Special Suuies. And anyone else who comes along. We're also committed to getting the Six Demands. And maybe we'd go a bit further to realize those demands than Doug and his men."

"One last question," said Emery. "President Hartmann, in his speech tonight, said that he intended to treat the A.L.F. like traitors."

"Let him try," Grinstein said, smiling. "Just let him try."

4.

THE ALFIE BOMBERS had edged onto the radarmap again. They were still at 100,000 feet, doing about Mach 1.7. The Vampyre pack would be on them in minutes.

Reynolds watched for LB-4s, almost numbly, through his eyeslit. He was cold and drenched with his own sweat. And very scared.

The lull between battles was worse than the battles themselves, he had decided. It gave you too much time to think. And thinking was bad.

He was sad and a little sick about McKinnis. But grateful. Grateful that it hadn't been him. Then he realized that it still might be. The night wasn't over. The LB-4s were no pushovers.

And all so needless. The Alfies were vicious fools. There were other ways, better ways. They didn't have to do this. Whatever sympathy he had ever felt for the A.L.F. had gone down in flames

with McKinnis and Trainor and the others.

They deserved whatever they had coming to them. And Hartmann, he was sure, had something in mind. So many innocent people dead. And for nothing. For a grandstand, desperado stunt without a prayer of success.

That was the worst part. The plan was so ill-conceived, so hopeless. The A.L.F. couldn't possibly win. They could shoot him down, sure. Like McKinnis. But there were other planes. They'd be found and taken out by someone. And if they got as far as Washington, there was still the city's ring of defensive missiles to deal with. Hartmann had had trouble forcing that through Congress. But it would come in handy now.

And even if the A.L.F. got there, so what? Did they really think Hartmann would give in? No way. Not him. He'd call their bluff, and either way they lost. If they backed down, they were finished. And if they dropped the bomb, they'd get Hartmann—but at the expense of millions of their own supporters. Washington was nearly all black. Hell, it gave the A.L.F. a big plurality in '84. What was the figure? Something like 65%, he thought. Around there, anyway..

It didn't make sense. It couldn't be. But it was.

There was a knot in his stomach. Churning and twisting. Through the eyeslit, he saw flickers of motion against the star field. The Alfies. The goddamn Alfies. His mind

turned briefly to Anne. And suddenly he hated the planes ahead of him, and the men who flew them.

"Hold your missiles till my order," Bonetto said: "And watch it."

The Vampyres accelerated. But the Alfies acted before the attack.

"Hey, look!" That was Dutton.

"They're splitting." A bass growl distorted by static; Ranczyk.

Reynolds looked at his radarmap. One of the LB-4s was diving sharply, picking up speed, heading for the sea of clouds that rolled below in the starlight. The other was going into a shallow climb.

"Stay together!" Bonetto again. "They want us to break up. But we're faster. We'll take out one and catch the other."

They climbed. Together at first, side by side. But then one of the sleek planes began to edge ahead.

"Dutton!" Bonetto's voice was a warning.

"I want him." Dutton's Vampyre screamed upward, into range of the bandit ahead. From his wings, twin missiles roared, closed.

And suddenly were not. The bomber's lasers burned them clean from the sky.

Bonetto tried to shout another order. But it was too late. Dutton was paying no attention. He was already shrieking to his kill.

This time Reynolds saw it all.

Dutton was way out ahead of the others, still accelerating, trying to close within laser range. He was out of missiles.

But the Alfie laser had a longer

range. It locked on him first.

The Vampyre seemed to writhe. Dutton went into a sharp dive, pulled up equally sharply, threw his plane from side to side. Trying to shake free of the laser. Before it killed. But the tracking computers in the LB-4s were faster than he could ever hope to be. The laser held steady.

And then Dutton stopped fighting. Briefly, his Vampyre closed again, climbing right up into the spear of light, its own lasers flashing out and converging. Uselessly; he was still too far away. And only for an instant.

Before the scream.

Dutton's Vampyre never even exploded. It just seemed to go limp. Its laser died suddenly. And then it was in a spin. Flames licking at the black fuselage, burning a hole in the black velvet of night.

Reynolds didn't watch the fall. Bonetto's voice had snapped him from his nightmare trance. "Fire!"

He let go on three and six, and they shrieked away from him towards the Alfie. Bonetto and Ranczyk had also fired. Six missiles rose together. Two more slightly behind them. Ranczyk had let loose with a second volley.

"At him!," Bonetto shouted. "Lasers!"

Then his plane was moving away quickly, Ranczyk with him. Black shadows against a black sky, following their missiles and obscuring the stars. Reynolds hung back briefly, still scared, still hearing Dutton's scream and seeing the fireball that

was McKinnis. Then, shamed, he followed.

The bomber had unleashed its own missiles, and its lasers were locked onto the oncoming threats. There was an explosion; several missiles wiped from the air. Others burned down.

But there were two Vampyres moving in behind the missiles. And then a third behind them. Bonetto and Ranczyk had their lasers locked on on the Alfie, burning at him, growing hotter and more vicious as they climbed. Briefly, the bomber's big laser flicked down in reply. One of the Vampyres went up in a cloud of flame, a cloud that still screamed upwards at the Alfie.

Almost simultaneously, another roar. A fireball under the wing of the bomber, rocked it. Its laser winked off. Power trouble? Then on again, burning at the hail of missiles. Reynolds flicked on his laser, and watched it lance out towards the chaos above. The other Vampyre—Reynolds wasn't sure which—was firing its remaining missiles.

They were almost on top of each other. In the radarmap and the infrared they were. Only in the eyeslit was there still space between the two.

And then they were together. Joining. One big ball, orange and red and yellow, swallowing both Vampyre and prey, growing, growing, growing.

Reynolds sat almost frozen, climbing towards the swelling in-

ferno, his laser firing ineffectively into the flames. Then he came out of it. And swerved. And dove. His laser fired once more, to wipe out a chunk of flaming debris that came spinning towards him.

He was alone. The fire fell and faded, and there was only one. Vampyre, and the stars, and the blanket of cloud far below him. He had survived.

But how? He had hung back. When he should have attacked. He didn't deserve survival. The others had earned it, with their courage. But he had hung back. He felt sick.

But he could still redeem himself. Yes. Down below, there was still one Alfie in the air. Headed towards Washington with its bombs. And only he was left to stop it.

Reynolds nosed the Vampyre into a dive, and began his grim descent.

AFTER A BRIEF station identification, Warren was back. With two guests and a new wrinkle. The wrinkle was the image of a large clock that silently counted down the time remaining while the newsmen talked. The guests were a retired Air Force general and a well-known political columnist.

Warren introduced them, then turned to the general. "Tonight's attack, understandably, has frightened a lot of people," he began. "Especially those in Washington. How likely is it that the threatened bombing will take

place?"

The general snorted. "Impossible, Ted. I know what kind of air defense systems we've got in this country. They were designed to handle a full-fledged attack, from another nuclear power. They can certainly handle a cheap-shot move like this."

"Then you'd say that Washington is in no danger?"

"Correct. Absolutely none. This plan was militarily hopeless from its conception. I'm shocked that even the A.L.F. would resort to such a foredoomed venture."

Warren nodded, and swiveled to face the columnist. "How about from a political point of view? You've been a regular observer of President Hartmann and the Washington scene for many years, Sid. In your opinion, did this maneuver have any chances of practical political success?"

"It's still very early," the columnist cautioned. "But from where I sit, I'd say the A.L.F. has committed a major blunder. This attack is a political disaster—or at least it looks like one, in these early hours. Because of Washington's large black population, I'd guess that this threat to the city will seriously undermine the A.L.F.'s support among the black community. If so, it would be a catastrophe for the party. In 1984, Douglass Brown drew more black votes than the other three candidates combined. Without these voters, the A.L.F. presidential campaign would have been a

farce."

"How will this affect other A.L.F. supporters?," Warren asked.

"That's a key question. I'd say it would tend to drive them away from the party. Since its inception, the A.L.F. has always had a large pacifist element, which frequently clashed with the more militant Alfies who made up the Community Defense Militia. I think that tonight's events might be the final blow for these people."

"Who do you think would benefit from these desertions?"

The columnist shrugged. "Hard to say. There's the possibility of a new splinter party being formed. And President Hartmann, I'm sure, will enjoy a large swing of support his way. The most likely possibility would be a revival of the Old Democratic Party, if it can regain the black voters and white radicals it has lost to the A.L.F. in recent years."

"Thank you," said Warren. He turned back to the camera; then glanced down briefly at the desk in front of him, checking the latest bulletins. "We'll have more analysis later," he said. "Right now, Continental's man in California is at Collins Air Base, where tonight's attack took place."

Warren faded. The new reporter was tall and thin and young. He was standing before the main gate of the air base. Behind him was a bustling tangle of activity, several jeeps, and large numbers

of police and soldiers. The spotlights were on again, and the destruction was clearly evident in the battered gatehouse and the twisted, shattered wire of the fence itself.

"Deke Hamilton here," the man began. "Ted, Continental came out here to check whether any attack did take place, since the A.L.F. has charged that the President was lying. Well, from what I've seen out here, it's the A.L.F. that's been lying. There *was* an attack, and it was a vicious one. You can see some of the damage behind you. This is where the attackers struck hardest."

Warren's voice cut in. "Have you seen any bodies?"

The reporter nodded. "Yes. Many of them. Some have been horribly mangled by the fighting. More than one hundred men from the base, I'd estimate. And about fifty Alfies."

"Have any of the attackers been identified?," Warren asked.

"Well, they're clearly Alfies," the reporter said. "Beards, long hair, A.L.F. uniforms. And many had literature in their pockets. Pamphlets advocating the Six Demands, that sort of thing. However, as of yet, no specific identifications have been announced. Except for the air men, of course. The base has released its own casualty lists. But not for the Alfies. As I said, many bodies are badly damaged, so identification may be difficult. I think some sort of mass burial is being

planned."

"Deke," said Warren, "has there been any racial breakdown on the casualties?"

"Uh—none has been released. The bodies I saw were all white. But then, the black population in this area is relatively small."

Warren started to ask another question. He never finished his sentence. Without warning, the picture from California suddenly vanished, and was replaced by chaos.

"This is Mike Petersen in Washington," the reporter said. He was awash in a sea of struggling humanity, being pushed this way and that. All around him fights were in progress, as a squad of Special Urban Police, in blue and silver, waded through a crowd of resisting Alfies. The A.L.F. symbol was on the wall behind Petersen.

"I'm at A.L.F. national headquarters," he said, trying valiantly to stay before the cameras. "I—" he was shoved to one side, fought back. "We've got quite a scene here. Just a few minutes ago, a detachment of Special Urban Police broke into the building, and arrested several of the A.L.F.'s national leaders, including Douglass Brown. Some of the other people here tried to stop them, and the police are now trying to make more arrests. There's been—damn!" Someone had spun into him. The cops were using clubs.

Petersen was trying to untangle

himself from the battle. He looked up briefly and started to say something. Then something hit the camera, and suddenly he was gone.

5.

REYNOLDS was very much conscious of being alone. He was at 60,000 feet and dropping rapidly, ripping through layer on layer of wispy cloud. In an empty sky. The Alfie was somewhere below him, but he couldn't see it yet.

He knew it was there, though. His radar map was acting up. That meant a scrambler nearby.

His eyes roamed, his thoughts wandered. It was one on one now. There might be help. Bonetto had radioed down when they first sighted the bandits. Maybe someone had tracked them. Maybe another flight was on its way to intercept the bomber.

And the again, maybe not.

Their course had been erratic. They were over Kentucky now. And they'd been up high, with scramblers going to confuse radar. Maybe their position wasn't known.

He could radio down. Yes. He should do that. But no, come to think of it. That would alert the Alfie. Maybe they didn't know he was behind them. Maybe he could take them by surprise.

He hoped so. Otherwise he was worried. There were only two missiles left. And Reynolds wasn't all that sure that a Vampire could

take an LB-4 one on one.

Loose facts rolled back and forth in his mind. The lasers. The bomber had a big power source. Its laser had a range nearly twice that of the smaller model on the Vampire. With a bigger computer to keep it on target.

What did he have? Speed. Yes. And maneuverability. And maybe he was a better pilot, too.

Or was he? Reynolds frowned. Come to think of it, the Alfies had pretty much held their own up to now. Strange. You wouldn't think they'd be so good. Especially when they made elementary mistakes like forgetting to throw in their scramblers.

But they had been. They flew almost like veterans. Maybe they were veterans. Hartmann had discharged a lot of A.L.F. sympathizers from the armed forces right after his election. Maybe some of them had gone all the way and actually joined the Alfies. And were coming back for revenge.

But that was three years ago. And the LB-4s were new. It shouldn't have been all that easy for the Alfies to master them.

Reynolds shook his head and shoved the whole train of thought to one side. It wasn't worth pursuing. However it had happened, the fact was the Alfies were damn good pilots. And any advantage he had there was negligible.

He looked at his instruments. Still diving at 40,000 feet. The LB-4 still below him somewhere,

but closer. The radar map was a useless dancing fuzz now. But there was an image on the infrared scope.

Through the eyeslit, he could see lightning flashes far below. A thunderstorm. And the bomber was diving through it. And slowing, according to his instruments. Probably going to treetop level.

He'd catch it soon.

And what then?

There were two missiles left. He could close and fire them. But the Alfie had its own missiles, and its laser net. What if his missiles didn't get through?

Then he'd have to go in with his own lasers.

And die. Like Dutton.

He tried to swallow, but the saliva caught in his throat. The damn Alfie had such a big power source. They'd be slicing him into ribbons long before he got close enough for his smaller weapon to be effective.

Oh, sure, he might take them, too. It took even a big gas dynamic laser a few seconds to burn through steel. And in those few seconds he'd be close enough to return the attentions.

But that didn't help. He'd die, with them.

And he didn't want to die.

He thought of Anne again. Then of McKinnis.

The Alfies would never reach Washington, he thought. Another flight of hunters would sight the LB-4, and catch it. Or the city's ABMs would knock it out. But

they'd never get through.

There was no reason for him to die to stop the bomber. No reason at all. He should pull up, radio ahead, land and sound the alarm.

Thick, dark clouds rolled around the plane, swallowed it. Lightning hammered at the nightblack wings, and shook the silver missiles in their slots.

And Reynolds sweated. And the Vampire continued to dive.

"THE QUESTION of what President Hartmann meant when he promised to treat the A.L.F. like traitors has been resolved," Ted Warren said, looking straight out of millions of holocubes, his face drawn and unreadable. "Within the last few minutes, we've had dozens of reports. All over the nation, the Special Urban Units are raiding A.L.F. headquarters and the homes of party leaders. In a few cities, including Detroit, Boston, and Washington itself, mass arrests of A.L.F. members are reported to be in progress. But for the most part, the S.U.U. seems to be concentrating on those in positions of authority with the Community Defense Militia or the party itself.

"Meanwhile, the Pentagon reports that the bandit planes that the A.L.F. is accused of taking have been tracked over Kentucky, heading towards Washington. According to informed Air Force sources, only one of the hijacked bombers is still in the air, and it

is being pursued by a interceptor. Other flights are now being rushed to the scene.

Warren looked outcube briefly, scowled at someone unseen, and turned back. "We have just been informed that the White House is standing by with a statement. I give you now the President of the United States."

The image changed. Again the Oval Office. This time Hartmann was standing, and he was not alone. Vice-President Joseph Delaney, balding and middle-aged, stood next to him, before a row of American flags.

"My fellow patriots," Hartmann began, "I come before you again to announce that the government is taking steps against the traitors who have threatened the very capitol of this great nation. After consulting with Vice-President Delaney and my Cabinet, I have ordered the arrest of the leaders of the so-called American Liberation Front."

Hartmann's dark eyes were burning, and his voice had a marvelous, fatherly firmness. Delaney, beside him, looked pale and frightened and uncertain.

"To those of you who have supported these men in the past, let me say now that they will receive every safeguard of a fair trial, in the American tradition," Hartmann continued. "As for yourselves, your support of the so-called A.L.F. was well-intentioned, no matter how misguided. No harm will come to you. However, your

leaders have tonight betrayed your trust, and your nation. They have forfeited your support. To aid them now would be to join in their treason.

"I say this especially to our black citizens, who have been so cruelly misled by A.L.F. sloganeering. Now is the time to demonstrate your patriotism, to make up for past mistakes. And to those who would persist in their error, I issue this warning; those who aid the traitors in resisting lawful authority will be treated as traitors themselves."

Hartmann paused briefly, then continued. "Some will question this move. With a legitimate concern for the American system of checks and balances; they will argue that I had no authority for deploying the Special Urban Units as I have done. They are right. But, special situations call for special remedies, and in this night of crisis, there was no time to secure Congressional approval. However, I did not act unilaterally." He looked towards De-laney.

The Vice-President cleared his throat. "President Hartmann consulted me on this matter earlier tonight," he began, in a halting voice. "I expressed some reluctance, at first, to approve his proposed course of action. But, after the President had presented me with all the facts, I could see that there was no realistic alternative. Speaking for myself, and for those Cabinet members who like

me represent the Republican Party, I concur with the President's actions."

Hartmann began to speak again, but the voice suddenly faded on the holocaust, and a short second later, the image also vanished. Ted Warren returned to the air.

"We will bring you the rest of the President's statement later," the anchorman said, "after several special bulletins. We have just been informed that all 32 A.L.F. members of the House of Representatives have been placed under arrest, as well as two of the three A.L.F. Senators. S.U.U. national headquarters reports that Senator Jackson Edwards is still at large, and is currently being sought after."

Warren shuffled some papers. "We also have reports of scattered street-fighting in several cities between the S.U.U. and the Community Defenders. The fighting appears to be most intense in Chicago, where Special Urban forces have surrounded the national center of the A.L.F.'s paramilitary wing. We take you now to Ward Emery, on the scene."

The image shifted. Emery was standing on the steps on the new Chicago Police Headquarters on South State Street. Every light in the building behind him burned brightly, and a steady stream of riot-equipped police was hurrying up and down the stairs.

"Not quite on the scene, Ted,"

he began. "Our crew was forcibly excluded from the area where the fighting is now in progress. We're here at Chicago Police Headquarters now, which you will recall was the focus of the battle during the 1985 riots. The local police and the Special Urban Units are doing their planning and coordinating from here."

Warren cut in with a voice-over. "What precisely has taken place?"

"Well," said Emery, "it started when a detachment of Special Urban Police arrived at Community Defender Central, as it's called, to arrest Mitchell Grinstein and several other organization leaders. I'm not sure who opened fire. But someone did, and there were several casualties. The Community Defenders have their headquarters heavily guarded, and they drove back the S.U.U. in the early skirmish that I witnessed. But things have changed since then. Although the local police have cordoned off a large portion of Chicago's South Side and excluded me and other reporters, I now understand that Grinstein and his Militiamen are holed up inside their building, which is under S.U.U. siege."

He looked around briefly. "As you can see, there's a lot of activity around here," he continued. "The local police are on overtime, and the Special Urban Units have mobilized their entire Chicago battalion. They're using their regular armored cars, plus some

heavier weapons. And I've also heard reports that something new has been deployed by the S.U.U.—a light tank with street tires instead of treads, designed for city use."

"Are all the A.L.F. forces concentrated around Grinstein's headquarters?" Warren asked.

Emery shook his head. "No, not at all. The ghettos on the South and West sides are alive with activity. The local police have suffered several casualties, and there's been one case of a squad car being Molotov-cocktailed. Also, there are rumors of an impending A.L.F. counterattack on Police Headquarters. The building is symbolic to both sides, of course, since the renegade local Militiamen seized and razed the earlier building on this site during the 1985 fighting."

"I see," said Warren. "The A.L.F. is known to have active chapters on several college campuses in your area. Have you gotten any reports from them?"

"Some," Emery replied. "The police have been ignoring the campus chapters up to now, but we understand that a strong force of Liberty Troopers moved in on the University of Illinois' Chicago campus in an attempt to make citizens' arrests. Some fighting was reported, but resistance was only light. The students were mostly without arms while the Liberty Troopers, of course, are a paramilitary force."

"Thank you, Ward," Warren

said, as the image suddenly shifted. "We'll be back to you later for an update. Now, we will continue with the rest of President Hartmann's most recent statement.

"For those who just flicked on, the President has just ordered the arrest of the A.L.F. leaders. This move was made with the support of the Vice-President, and thus presumably with the support of the Old Republicans, the President's partners in his coalition government. It's an important shift on the part of the Old Republicans. Last year, you will recall, Hartmann's efforts to pass his Subversive Registration Bill were thwarted when Vice-President Delaney and his followers refused to back the measure.

"Since the Liberty Alliance and the Old Republicans, between them, command a majority in both houses of Congress, Delaney's support of Hartmann guarantees Congressional approval of the President's actions tonight.

"And now, the rest of the Presidential message . . ."

6.

THERE WERE hills below; and dark forests in a shroud of night. And the only light was the sudden jagged brilliance of the lightning. But there were two thunders.

One was the thunder of the storm that churned above the forest. The other was the thunder of the jet, screaming between the stormclouds and the trees and lay-

ing down a trail of sonic booms across the landscape.

That was the Alfie. Reynolds watched it in his infrared scope, watched it play at Mach 1, slip back and forth over the barrier. And while he watched he gained on it.

He had stopped sweating, stopped thinking, stopped fearing. Now he only acted. Now he was part of the Vampyre.

He descended through the stormclouds, blind but for his instruments, lashed by the lightning. Everything that was human in him told him to pull up and let something else take the Alfie. But something else, some drive, some compulsion, told him that he must not hang back again.

So he descended.

The Alfie knew he was there. That was inevitable. It was simply holding its fire. As he was holding his missiles. He would save them until the last second, until the Alfie lasers were locked on him.

The Vampyre moved at half again the bomber's speed. Ripped through the last bank of clouds. Framed by the lightning. Fired its lasers.

The beams cut the night, touched the bomber, converged. Too far away. Hardly hot. But warming, warming. Every micro-second brought the sleek black interceptor closer, and the wand of light grew deadlier.

And then the other beam jumped upward from the bomber's tail. Swords of light

crossed in the night. And the shrieking Vampyre impaled itself upon the glowing stake.

Reynolds was watching his injured when it died. The mere touch of the enemy laser had been too much for the system's delicate opticals. But he didn't need it, now. He could see the bomber, ahead and below, outlined in the flashes.

There were alarms ringing, clamoring, slamming at his ears. He ignored them. It was too late now. Too late to pull away and up. Too late to shake the lasers.

Now there was only time to find a victim.

Reynolds' eyes were fixed on the bomber, and it grew larger by the microsecond. His hand was on the missile stud, waiting, waiting. The warheads were armed. The computers were locked, tracking.

The Alfie loomed large and larger in the eyeslit. And he saw its laser slicing through the dark. And around him, he could feel the Vampyre shake and shudder.

And he fired.

Four and five were flaming arrows in the night, climbing down at the Alfie. It seemed, almost, like they were sliding down the laser path that the Vampyre had burned.

Reynolds, briefly, saw his plane as the others must have seen it. Black and ominous, howling from the stormclouds down at them, lasers afire, draped in lightning, spitting missiles. Exhilaration! Glorydeath! He held the

vision tightly.

The Alfie laser was off him, suddenly. Too late. The alarms still rang. His control was gone.

The Vampyre was burning, crippled. But from the flames the laser still licked out.

The bomber burned one missile from the sky. But the other was climbing up a jet. And the Vampyre's fangs now had a bite to them.

And then the night itself took flame.

Reynolds saw the fireball spread over the forest, and something like relief washed over him, and he shuddered. And then the sweat came back, in a rushing flood.

He watched the woods come up at him, and he thought briefly of ejecting. But he was too low and too fast and it was hopeless. He tried to capture his vision again. And he wondered if he'd get a medal.

But the vision was elusive, and the medal didn't seem to matter now.

Suddenly all he could think about was Anne. And his cheeks were wet. And it wasn't sweat.

He screamed.

And the Vampyre hit the trees at Mach 1.4.

THERE WERE CIRCLES under Warren's eyes, and an ache in his voice. But he continued to read.

"... in Newark, New Jersey, local police are engaged in pitched street battles with the

Special Urban Units. City officials in Newark, elected by the A.L.F., mobilized the police when the S.U.U. attempted to arrest them . . .

" . . . latest announcement from S.U.U. headquarters says that Douglass Brown and six other leading A.L.F. figures died while attempting to escape from confinement. The attempted escape came during a surprise attack by Community Defense Militiamen on the jail where Brown and the others were imprisoned, the release says . . .

" . . . both the Community Defense Militia and the Liberty Troopers have been mobilized from coast-to-coast by their leaders, and have taken to the streets. The Liberty Troopers are assisting the Special Urban Units in their campaign against the Community Defenders . . .

" . . . President Hartmann has called out the National Guard . . .

" . . . riots and looting reported in New York, Washington, and Detroit, and numerous smaller cities . . .

" . . . in Chicago is a smoldering ruin. Mitchell Grinstein is reported dead, and well as other top A.L.F. leaders. A firebombing has destroyed a wing of the new Police Headquarters . . . Loop reported in flames . . . bands of armed men moving from the ghetto sections into the Near North . . .

" . . . Community Defenders in California charge that they had nothing to do with original attack . . . have demanded that the

bodies be produced and identified . . . mass burial, already ordered . . ."

" . . . bombing of Governor's mansion in Sacramento . . .

" . . . Liberty Alliance has called all citizens to take up arms, and wipe out the A.L.F. . . . that an attempted revolution is in progress . . . this was the plan all along, Alliance charges . . . California attack a signal . . .

" . . . A.L.F. charges that California attack was Hartmann ploy . . . cites Reichstag fire . . .

" . . . Governor Horne of Michigan has been assassinated . . .

" . . . national curfew imposed by S.U.U. . . . has called on all citizens to return to their homes . . . still out in one hour will be shot on sight . . .

" . . . A.L.F. reports that Senator Jackson Edwards of New Jersey was dragged from his police sanctuary in Newark and shot by Liberty Troopers . . .

" . . . martial law declared . . .

" . . . reports that last bandit plane has been shot down . . .

" . . . Army has been mobilized . . .

" . . . Hartmann has declared death penalty for any who aid so-called revolutionaries . . .

" . . . alleges . . .

" . . . charges . . .

" . . . reports . . ."

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—GEORGE R.R. MARTIN

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BRIAN M. STABLEFORD

THE ENGINEER AND THE EXECUTIONER

Brian Stableford, author of "The Sun's Tears" (October, 1974) and "An Offer of Oblivion" (December, 1974), returns with a somewhat different kind of story about a genetic engineer and his blueprint for life . . .

Illustrated by ROY COMISKEY

"MY LIFE," said the engineer. "It's mine. Can you understand that?"

"I understand," replied the executioner calmly.

"I created it," persisted the little man with the spectacles and the unsteady eyes. "I made it, with my own hands. It wasn't all the creation of my own imagination. Other men can take credit for the actual *plan*, and the theory which allowed them to make the plan. But *I* made it. It was me who put the genes together, sculptured the chromosomes, put the initial cell together. Mine was the real job. I gave the time, the concentration, the determination. The others played with ideas, but I actually built their life-system. I made a dream come true. But you can't understand how I feel about it."

"I understand," repeated the robot. His red eyes shone unblinking from its angular head. He really did understand.

"Look at it," said the little man,

waving an arm towards the great concave window that was one wall of the room. "Look at it and tell me it's not worth anything. It's mine, remember. It all grew from what I built. It all evolved from the cells I created. It's going its own way now. It has been for years. But I put it on that road."

The man and the robot stared through the glass. Beyond the window was the hollow interior of Asteroid Lamarck. From space, Lamarck looked like any other asteroid. It had crater-scars and boulders and lots of dust. But it was hollow, and inside it was a tightly-sealed, carefully controlled, Earth-simulation environment. It had air, and water—carefully transported from Earth—and light from the great batteries which trapped solar energy on the outside of the planetoid and released it again on the inside.

The light was pale and pearly. It waxed and waned as the asteroid turned on its axis. At this

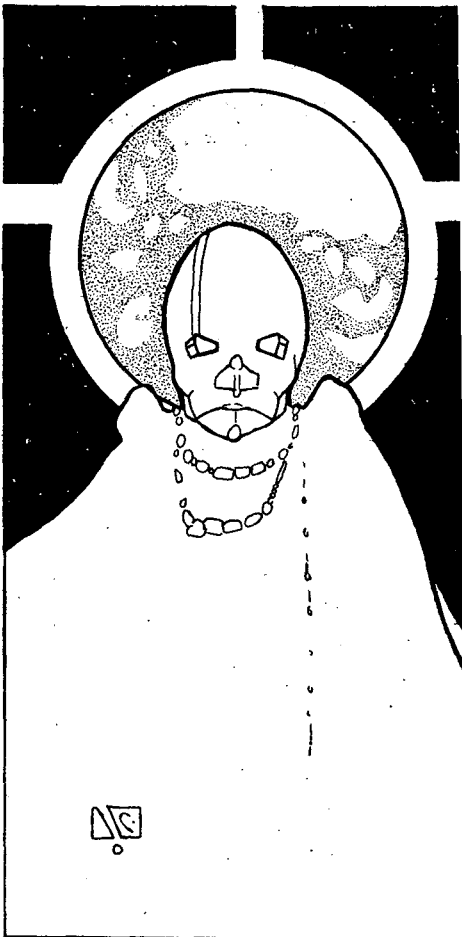
particular moment it shone bright and clear—it was the middle of inner-Lamarck's day.

It showed the edge of a great forest of silver, shimmering things like wisps of cobweb. The things were so slight and filmy that it seemed as though one ought to be able to see a long way, but in fact clear vision was lost within a hundred metres of the observation window.

Half-hidden by the silvery web-work were, other growths of different colours and species. There were red ones like sea anemones that moved their tentacles in a slow, rhythmic dance, as though fishing for prey too tiny to be seen by human eyes. There were pale spheres of lemon yellow mottled with darker colours, suspended within the framework of the silver filaments. There were tall, ramrod-straight spikes of varying colours which grew in geometrically regular clumps at random intervals.

There were things which moved too—airborne puffballs and tiny beings like tropical fish which floated in the gigantic bowl of air. There seemed to be no crawling life, nothing that walked. Everything mobile flew or floated. The shell of the asteroid was so thin that there was practically no gravity in the vast chamber. There was no up and down. There was only surface and lumen.

"The life-system is somewhere between community, organism and cell," said the engineer. "It



possesses certain characteristics of each. The method of reproduction employed by the life system is so unique as to make its strict classification impossible by means of the terms we apply to types of Earth organic material. It is completely closed. Light is the only thing which comes in from the outside, to provide the energy which keeps the system in operation. Water, air, minerals are all recycled. There is no more organic matter there than there has ever been. Everything is used and reused as the life-system evolves and improves. As it grows, it changes, day by day it evolves. It was designed to evolve, to mutate and adapt at a terrific pace. The cycle of its elements is a spiral rather than a circle. Nothing ever returns to a former state. Every generation is a new species, nothing ever reproduces itself. What I have built here is ultra-evolution—evolution which is not caused by natural selection. My life-system exhibits true Lamarckian evolution. My life is better than the life which was spawned on Earth. Don't you see why it's so important, so wonderful?"

"I do," said the robot.

"It's the most wonderful thing we have ever made," continued the little man dreamily. "It is the greatest of our achievements. And I built it. It's mine."

"I know," said the executioner, irrelevantly.

"You don't know," said the lit-

tle man. "What can you know? You're metal. Hard, cold metal. You don't reproduce. Your kind has no evolution. What do you know about life-systems? You can't know what it's like to live and change, to dream and build. How can you claim to know what I mean?"

"I try to understand."

"You came to destroy it all! You came to send Lamarck toppling into the sun, to burn my world and my life into cinders. You were sent to commit murder. How can a murderer claim to understand life? Life is sacred."

"I am not the murderer," said the robot calmly. "It was the people who sent me who made the decision. Real, live people. They must have understood, but they took the decision. Metal doesn't make decision. Metal doesn't murder. I only came to do what I was told to do."

"They can't tell you to kill me," said the bespectacled man, in a low, petulant voice. "They can't make you destroy my work. They can't throw me into the sun. It is against the law to commit murder. Robots can't break the law."

"Sometimes the law has to be ignored," quoted the robot. "It was considered too dangerous to permit Asteroid Lamarck to exist. It was held that the dangerous experiment begun here should be obliterated with all possible speed, and that no possibility of contamination should be tolerated."

"It was held that Asteroid Lamarck held a danger which threatens the existence of life on Earth. It was considered that there was a danger of spores leaking from within the planetoid which were capable of crossing space. It was pointed out that if such an eventuality were to come about, there would be absolutely no way of preventing the Lamarck life-system from destroying all life on Earth.

"It was concluded that, however small the probability of such an occurrence, the potential loss was too great for any such risk to be taken. It was therefore ordered that Asteroid Lamarck should be tipped into the sun, and that nothing which had been in contact with the asteroid should be allowed to return to Earth."

The little man wasn't really listening. He had heard it before. He was staring hard through the window, at the silver forest. His unsteady eyes were leaking little teardrops into the corners of his eyes. He was not crying for himself, but for the life he had created in Lamarck.

"But *why*?" he complained. "My life—it's wonderful, beautiful. It means more to science than anything else we've made or discovered. *Who* took this decision? *Who* wants to destroy it?"

"It is dangerous," stated the executioner, obstinately. "It must be destroyed."

"You've been programmed to secrecy," said the engineer.

"They are afraid. They are even afraid to tell me who they are. That's not the work of honest men—responsible men. It was politicians who sent you, not scientists.

"What are they really afraid of? Afraid that my life might evolve intelligence? That it might become cleverer, better in every way than a man? But that is foolishness."

"I know nothing about fear," said the robot. "I know what I have been told, and I know what you think of it. But the facts are unalterable. There is a danger of infection from Asteroid Lamarck. The consequences of such a danger are so terrible that no such danger can be allowed to exist for a moment longer than is inevitable."

"My life could never reach Earth."

"It is felt that there is a danger of the evolution of Arrhenius spores."

"Arrhenius spores," sneered the little man. "What could Arrhenius know? He died hundreds of years ago. His speculations are nonsense. His concept of life-spores seeding new planets was naive and ridiculous. There is no evidence that such spores could ever exist. If the men who sent you used Arrhenius spores as an excuse, then they are fools."

"No risk, however slight, is worthwhile," persisted the robot.

"There is *no* danger," stressed the genetic engineer. "We are

separated from my life forms by a wall of glass. In all the years I have worked here, my life has never breached that wall. What you are suggesting involves breaking through the crust of a planetoid and crossing a hundred and eighty million miles of space, then finding a relatively small world and becoming established." The little man's voice had risen sharply, and he was gabbling.

"I'm sorry," said the robot.

"You're sorry! How can you be sorry? You aren't alive. How can you know what life means, let alone feel as I feel about it?"

"I am alive," contradicted the executioner. "I am as alive as you, or as the world beyond your window."

"You can't feel sorrow," snapped the little man. "You're only metal. You can't understand."

"Your passionate determination to demonstrate my lack of understanding is wrong," said the robot, with a hint of metallic bitterness. "I know exactly what your life-system is. I know exactly what you are. I know exactly what you feel."

"But you can't feel it yourself."

"No."

"Then you don't understand." The little man was quiet again, his anger spent against the executioner's coldness.

"I understand exactly what you have done, and why," said the robot patiently.

"Then you know there is no danger," said the engineer.

"Your life-system, if it ever got to Earth, would destroy the planet. Your life-system does not reproduce by replication. Every organism is unique, and carries two chromosomes, each one of which carries a complete genome. One chromosome determines the organism, the other codes for a virus particle. This second chromosome is dormant until the organism reaches senility, whereupon it pre-empts control of protein synthesis from the organism-chromosome. Billions and billions of virus particles are produced and the organism dies of its in-built disease. The virus particles are released and are universally infective. Any protein-synthesizing system is open to their attack. On infection, the organism-chromosome and the organism-chromosome of the host fuse and co-adapt, evolving by a process of directed change. The new chromosome then induces meta-morphosis of the host body, into a creature which is at first parasitic, but may later become free-living. The new being carries the dormant virus chromosome in its own cells.

"The important aspect of the life-system is the fact that the virus may infect absolutely any living creature, irrespective of whether or not it is already a part of the life-system. There is no possible immunization. Thus, eventually, all life in any continuum must inevitably become part of the life-system. And incor-

poration inevitably means total loss of identity."

The little man nodded. "So you know it all," he conceded. "You know just what it is and how it works. Yet even knowing all the facts you can stand there and accuse me of creating some kind of Frankenstein monster which is just waiting to destroy me and conquer Earth. Can't you see how childish and ludicrous it is?"

"There exists a danger," said the robot obstinately.

"Utter nonsense! My life-system is absolutely bound to the inside of Asteroid Lamarck. There is no possibility of its ever reaching the exterior. If it did, it could not live. Not even a system as versatile as mine could live out there, without air or water. Only robots can do that. There is no escape from Lamarck, as far as the system is concerned."

"If, as you have claimed in your reports, the evolution of the Lamarck life-system is directive and improving, then it would be a mistake to limit the presumed capabilities of the system. There is a finite probability that the system will gain access to outer Lamarck, and will evolve a mechanism of extraplanetary dispersal."

"Arrhenius spores!" spat the little man. "*How?* Just tell me, *how?* How can a closed system, inside an asteroid, get spores to Earth, *against* the solar wind? Surely, even the idiots who sent you must realise that Arrhenius

spores must drift outwards, *away* from Earth, even if there were a vanishingly small probability that such spores could be formed."

"It is impossible to make predictions about the pattern of drift within the solar system," stated the robot implacably.

"Do you think I'm a fool?"

"No."

"Then why do you refuse to concede anything that I say. Robots are essentially logical beings. Surely I have logic on my side."

"No amount of logic can save you. The device is already set and activated. Asteroid Lamarck is on its way into the sun. There is no appeal against the decision."

"No appeal," sneered the genetic engineer. "There is no appeal because they did not dare allow me a voice. There is no justice in this decision. There is only fear."

"There is fear," admitted the robot.

"You try to convince me that there is reason behind this death sentence. You speak in cold, exact terms of probability and danger. You try to tell *me*, to cover the truth and the guilt."

"Be honest, if you can. Tell me the truth—that I have been condemned to death by a crazy, irrational fear—the fear of some monstrous ghost which can never evolve from my life-system. That's all it is—a crazy, stupid, pathological fear of something they can't begin to understand or appreciate. Fear that can be made

to breed fear, to infect others with fear. Fear that can be used as a lever to make death sentences. They say that my infective virus might reach Earth. It is there already. Fear infects everything, and its second generation is murder."

"Fear is only natural," said the executioner.

"Natural!" The little man raised his bespectacled eyes to the ceiling and spread his arms wide. "What sort of nature is afraid of nature?"

"Human nature," said the robot, with mechanical glibness.

"That's what condemned me," said the man. "Human nature. Not reason—not finite probabilities. Human nature, human vanity and human fear. But what they are afraid of is only themselves.

"Humans designed this virus. Biochemists and geneticists conceived it. Genetic engineers and construct surgeons assembled it. The entire system is a produce of human inspiration, human ingenuity, human ability.

"What are you going to quote to me now? There are some things that man was not meant to know? Creation is the prerogative of divinity?"

"No," said the executioner. "I will say simply that because a man can do something, there is not an *ipse facto* reason why he should or must. What you have brought into existence is so potentially dangerous that it cannot be

allowed to remain in existence."

"They told you to say that."

"These are my words," persisted the robot. "I do as I am told. I say what I am told to say. But I believe. I am metal, but I am alive. I believe in myself. I know what I am doing."

"It's a death sentence for you too," said the engineer.

"I accept the necessity."

"Is that supposed to make me accept it too? You're a robot. You don't put the same value on life that I do. You're programmed to die. No matter what your metal mind believes, you can't be human. You can't accept human values. You're only a machine."

"Yes," said the robot demurely, "I am a machine."

The little man stared through the glass wall, forcing back the nausea, the frustration—and the fear.

"It's not just me," said the man. "It's my life. It's everything I've ever done—everything I believe in. I don't want to die, but I don't want *all this* to die either. It's important to me. I made it. *That*, you can't possibly understand."

"If you say so," conceded the executioner, tiredly.

"I don't understand it either," confessed the little man.

"No," said the robot. "You can't. It isn't your science. It's your child."

The man bridled. "Who are you to judge? *What* are you to judge? How can a metal creature say

things like that? What's the difference to me? My science is my child. Because I love the system I have created, is my reason devalued? Are my arguments to be discounted because I am personally involved with them?"

"Your arguments don't matter at all. The argument is already over."

"And the sentence passed. Who spoke for me? Who presented my arguments, my defence?"

"They were presented," said the robot stiffly.

"And discounted. Devalued."

"The decision was made. All the facts were taken into consideration. Every possible course of action was studied. But no chances can be taken. Asteroid Lamarck and everything which has come into contact with it, must be destroyed. The danger of infection must be eliminated."

"They must be mad," said the little man distantly. "Unreasoned fear couldn't spread so far. They are not even content with taking my life. They must kill me too. They must murder as well as destroy. Surely that means they are afraid of *me*—of what I might say. How tenuous must their arguments be, if they dare not allow my voice to be heard?"

"They were afraid of spores," said the robot. "You have come into close personal contact with the system. It would have been inviting the danger which they want to prevent, if they allowed you to return to Earth."

"Are you sure? Do you believe that as well? Why didn't they claim that my knowledge was too dangerous as well? Wouldn't it have been far more diplomatic to have me die in an accident?"

"Or is that what they *will* say?" added the engineer, as the thought occurred to him.

"It makes no difference," said the robot.

"Who is it that sent you?" demanded the little man, knowing full well that he was going to get no answer from the executioner. "Who started the scare?"

"What scare?" parried the robot.

"This panic. Who spread the fear behind this decision? It didn't just grow. It didn't form in serious minds because of spontaneous generation. Someone put it there. Someone embarked upon a crusade. Someone wanted a lever. It's obvious.

"I'm not stupid enough to think that anyone hates me, or that some lunatic really does believe in the danger of infection. Someone wanted a platform. Someone wanted to exploit fear, to make a crusade which could carry him along at its head. It's politics that produced your twisted logic. It's politics that swore you to secrecy. It's politics that uses fear as a weapon. That's it, isn't it?"

"I don't know."

"I do. Fear doesn't just spring into being, fully formed. It has to be spread, like a virus. It has to be nurtured, injected. It's part of

the currency of politics. Planted, grown, bought and sold."

"You're talking nonsense," said the robot sensibly.

"Tell me I don't understand," suggested the little man, and laughed. The robot didn't laugh.

"There's no point," said the robot, "in trying to change my mind. You can't devalue my arguments, because the decision has already been made. The sentence has already been carried out."

The little man walked away from the glass wall, towards the door.

"Nothing you do will help," said the robot. "If you are going to fetch the gun from your desk, don't bother. There's nothing you can do. The device was planted and activated before I came here. Lamarck is already dead."

The little man stopped and turned his head.

"I wasn't going to fetch the gun," he said.

The robot couldn't smile. "Go on then," said the executioner. "Go and do whatever you want to do."

The little man left, and the robot turned his red eyes to the glass wall. He stood in silent contemplation, watching the silken forest. Beyond and within the silver threadwork—which was all one organism—were other organisms, other fractions of organisms. The robot did not try to see them. He was not interested.

ASTEROID LAMARCK began to lose

orbital velocity, and started a long, slow spiral in towards the sun.

THE LITTLE MAN held the gun in both hands. He had small, delicate hands and thin arms. The gun was heavy.

"What are you going to do?" asked the robot, quietly.

The little man peered through his thin-rimmed spectacles at the unfamiliar object which he held.

"It won't help you to shoot me with that," said the robot.

"What do you care whether I shoot you or not?" demanded the little man. His voice was sharp and emotional. "You're metal. You don't understand *life*. You kill, but you don't know what you're really doing."

"I know what it is to live," said the robot.

"You *exist*," sneered the engineer. "You don't know what a human life *means*. You don't know what *that* means—" he pointed at the window in the wall—"to me, to science. You only want to kill. To kill life, to kill knowledge, to kill science. For fear."

"We've been through all that."

"What else is there to do but go through it all again? What else is there but talk, until Lamarck falls into the sun and you and I become cinders? What do *you* want to do?"

"It's futile to argue."

"Everything's futile. I'm a condemned man. Whatever I do, it's

a waste of time. I'm a dead man. You're a dead robot. But you don't care."

The executioner remained silent.

The little man raised the gun, and pointed it at one of the robot's red eyes. For a few moments, man and metal stared at each other. The robot watched a thin, unsteady finger press the trigger of the gun.

The hands that held the gun jerked as the recoil jolted the genetic engineer. There was a loud bang. The bullet clanged off the metal ceiling, ricocheted into the window, but the glass was unbroken.

"It's pointless," said the robot softly. Somehow, after the report of the gun, his calmness seemed plaintive.

The little man fired again, squeezing the muscles round his eyes and mouth as he struggled to keep his hands still. The bullet splashed the robot's electronic eye into tiny red fragments. The metal man moaned, and went over backwards. There was a moment when the balance adjustment in his double-jointed knees compensated for the impact, and held the robot in a backward kneeling position. Then the moaning ended in a sharp gasp, and the engineer winced as the robot fell full length on to the floor.

The dead robot gave a mock laugh, which rattled harshly out of the uncoordinated vocal ap-

paratus. The engineer stared at the crumpled heap of metal. It was no longer a parody of a human form. It was just metal. It was dead.

The little man walked slowly over to the large window. He fired from the waist, gunfighter style. The bullet bounced off the glass and hit him in the thigh. His face went pale, and he winced, but he did not fall. He fired three more times, and the third time the glass cracked. But there was still no breach in the glass wall.

The engineer felt tears easing from the corners of his eyes, and a trickle of blood on his leg. He smashed the butt of the gun into the glass again and again. The cracks spread, and finally the window gave up the fight and shattered.

Once the gap was there, it was easy to enlarge it. The little man allowed the artificial gravity of the laboratory to pull him to the floor, resting his injured leg, while he chipped away at the lower edge of the hole until he had made a doorway in the wall.

He crawled through, into the world of his life-system. Once there, beyond the pull of gravity, his leg stopped hurting him, and his body was filled with an exhilarating buoyancy.

He breathed the air, and imagined that he found it cleaner and fresher than the cold, sterile air of his own world inside Lamarck. He felt nothing, but he knew that in the air he breathed,

and through the wound in his leg, the virus was invading his body.

He began to crawl away from the window, to get away from the murdered robot, and found that he could crawl with amazing rapidity and with little expenditure of effort. There was just enough gravity to stop him hurting himself. The engineer left the window behind, because it was not a window into a world that had sent an executioner to take away his life. He pulled himself further and further into the body of the silver forest, and on, and on.

He found another forest—another single being with many individual aspects. This was a conglomeration of tree-forms which consisted of twisted, many-branched stalks, each of which seemed to have arisen by a process of bifurcation and spiralling away of elements from a single point or origin. Each of the branches terminated in a small, eye-like spheroid.

The branches were of equal thickness, and of a glass-like smoothness and hardness. At first sight, the entire forest seemed petrified, but there was life there, and growth. Nothing petrified in the Lamarck life-system. Within the globes at the ends of the branches, the engineer could perceive movement, and when he stopped to look more closely, he saw a shifting and pouring like swirling smoke that could only be cytoplasmic streaming. He per-

ceived darker regions that were nuclei and organelles. He concluded that the spheroids were the living elements of a colonial being or hive, which constructed the stalks which bore them from purely inorganic matter.

Then he pulled himself on, half-flying through the small forest, and into another forest, and another. He had lost sight of the smashed window, and he could not see the battery of solar cells which were the only other evidence of human interference with the Lamarck life-system. He was alone, a stranger in the world he had made. He floated to a stop, and sank slowly to the carpet of tiny unique organisms. He lay, exhausted, listening to the beating of his heart and admiring the wonders which his genetic engineering skill had produced.

He saw a giant plant, not far off, which must have covered a much larger area of ground than any of the so-called forests. It was of such complexity that it was built in tiers in the air.

The lowest layer consisted of a dense tangle of light-coloured tendrils of even continuity, not unlike the filaments of the silken forest. The slender threads were woven into a cushion of varying density.

Above this was a looser serial carpet of thicker elements which were darker in colour, but of a similar even texture. The threads stirred gently, and appeared to be very flexible.

From this aerial stratum there extended towers of small spherical elements, held vertical by some adhesive force that was not apparent. These spherical cells were being continually produced by budding from the filaments. The topmost spheres were always losing the mysterious adhesion and drifting away, falling very slowly, in a dipping-and-soaring fashion. Eventually, they exploded into clouds of invisibly small virus particles.

In the opposite direction, the engineer could see another vast growth, which had the appearance of a tree bearing fruits that were precious stones. The growth arose from a deep bed of slime—a great, extensive cushion which would have seemed hostile to life had it not been part of the Lamarck life-system. When he squinted, the little man could perceive thousands of rod-like bodies moving randomly within the slime-body.

The tree itself was slender and extremely beautiful in the manner of its curving and branching. The branches were translucent, but not wholly clear, for at certain points they contained encapsulated rod-bodies, entombed like flies in amber. The engineer imagined that the tree was formed of crystalline slime.

At the tip of each branch was a large spherical or elliptical jewel, each enclosed by a thin membrane. There was movement within each gem, and they looked

like the many faceted eyes of some strange beast.

The engineer looked, and marvelled, and loved.

ASTEROID LAMARCK passed within the orbit of Mars.

THE ENGINEER SLEPT, and while he slept he died.

The virus worked within him. It invaded cells, penetrated nuclei. It pre-empted protein production. It killed. And while it was still killing, it began rebuilding and regenerating. The second virus chromosome and the forty-six human chromosomes formed a complex, and the DNA within them began to undergo chemical metamorphosis as bases shifted and genes were remodeled.

As the new genotype was created, the virus sculpted, stimulated and responded. It mutated and tested. The path of generation of the new being was amended continually.

In conjunction with the chemical metamorphosis came physical change. The body of the engineer began to flow and distort. A new being was born inside him and was growing from him, feeding on him. The virus tested the viability of what its second set of chromosomes was building, and the being that was emerging was perfectly designed to fulfill its task. The process which was going on inside the corpse of the little man was far beyond the elementary process which the engineer had

made. The rapidity of the Lamarck life-system's evolution had taken the speed, the smoothness, and the efficiency of the metamorphosis a long way.

The new being absorbed the engineer, and came slowly to maturity.

ASTEROID LAMARCK crossed the orbit of Earth.

THE BODY of the little man had lost most of its substance. The face had widened into a skull-grin, and the ridiculous pair of spectacles lay lop-sided across the gleaming white bridge of the nose. The brain had completely gone from the skull, and the whole of the lower abdomen had disappeared. The legs were only thin ropes of decayed muscle. The ribs were reduced to tiny studs attached to what had once been the spine. Only dust remained where the internal organs had once been.

Above the corpse, a winged thing hovered bat-like, testing its strength. It was small-bodied but large-skulled. It had a tiny, oddly human, wizened face without eyes. The face moved continuously as though expressing unknown emotions, and the creature made a small, thin sound like a rattling laugh.

It flew away from the remains of its father, zooming through the weird forests of inner Lamarck in great circles. Finally, it found the silver forest, and settled on a

branch very near to the smashed glass wall. It lay still. It had never eaten. It was not even equipped to eat. It had been born only to perform one small task for the Lamarck life-system, and then to die again.

Meanwhile, the plants of inner Lamarck had passed through the doorway which the engineer had made for them. They had explored his laboratories, his library, his bedroom, his office. They had slipped under doors and through keyholes. There was only one place they could not reach, and that was the world of outer Lamarck, beyond the great iron air-lock that had neither crack nor key.

Plants died, and were reborn. New types of plant formed around and on the iron door—plants that built their cell walls out of pure iron. With vegetable efficiency, they began to dissolve the airlock.

The winged creature began to sprinkle tiny objects from its abdomen. A sphincter pulsed and pulsed, hundreds of contractions per minute, and every pulse released another particle. The motes floated in the air, far too light for the weak gravity to pull them to the ground. The air in the silver forest became filled with them.

ASTEROID LAMARCK crossed the orbit of Venus.

PINPRICKS FORMED in the outer airlock door. The inner door was

completely gone. Air began to seep away, but before the seepage became dramatic, the holes were the size of fists. Like all the other members of the Lamarck life-system, the iron-eaters were fast and efficient. The seepage became a rush. With it, the air took the tiny particles produced in hundreds of millions by the winged creature.

Lamarck was too small to hold

the atmosphere which flooded out into the desolation of its outer surface. The air was lost and the particles with it. While Lamarck plunged on towards the sun, in an ever-decreasing spiral, it left behind a long, long trail of Arrhenius spores, which began to drift lazily on the solar wind.

Slowly outwards, toward the orbit of Earth.

—BRIAN M. STABLEFORD

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A. Total No. Copies Printed (Net Press Run)	67,050	68,246
B. Paid Circulation		
1. Sales through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors and Counter Sales	22,440	22,800
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C. Total Paid Circulation	24,091	24,313
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Sol Cohen, Publisher

THE NAME OF THE GAME

The American utopian ideal, for the first half of the twentieth century, was to gain freedom from work—for labor to be taken over by machines so that we might be freed for lifetimes of leisure . . . but the Work Ethic has been engrained in our psyches for much longer. What will happen if some day Utopia is realized. . . ?

RACHEL COSGROVE PAYES

Illustrated by STEVE FABIAN

ANGUS MCLEOD knew he'd never make it. The shore was somewhere ahead, much too far ahead, and his arms were stuffed sausages, his legs jelly. Still he kept on, although by now it was all as senseless as the frantic racing of a squirrel in an exercise wheel. His lungs were on fire, his rhythm was off so that he swallowed a mouthful of brackish water and nearly strangled, and he was tired, tired, tired.

He was just ready to turn onto his back and float, when he caught a glimpse of something in the water beside him. Someone else was moving up to take the lead. He tapped reserves he didn't even know he had. Far from being ready to give up, McLeod now was determined to win.

Try as he could, though, he managed only to hold his own. With the added spurt of energy, he was able to keep the other swimmer from passing him; but

he could not pick up even a foot of lead over the other contender.

Exhaustion coupled with the frenzy to win dulled his senses so that McLeod scraped his foot on bottom before he realized that he had reached the shore. He staggered through the shallow water and collapsed, gasping, on the sand without even seeing who his competitor was.

Someone threw a warm blanket over him, and when he managed to sit up, a cup of steaming coffee was thrust into his trembling hands.

Then he heard the hated voice of the Trainer. "You came in tied for first, McLeod; but you didn't break the record."

"Who tied me?" He was really too exhausted to care; but it was the kind of interest the Trainer expected of the men.

"A new man. Zinn. You'll have to look alert now, McLeod. He's just transferred from Camp Three on the West Coast."

Even tired as he was from the grueling swim, McLeod felt a stab of anxiety. He'd been doing so well, leading Camp One for nearly a month, now. Even Sanders, who'd been his biggest threat, had begun to fade off. Another six weeks to go, and McLeod had begun to think he'd win it hands down, justifying the Compets' entrance into the Games.

Zinn.

He glanced up, his eyes still smarting from the water, to look into a sardonic face, long and narrow under sleek, black hair, crooked smile that mocked, and cold, cold eyes of a blue so pale they were nearly gray.

"I'm Zinn. Rafe Zinn. I see I have my work cut out for me."

"Angus McLeod. You gave me a run for my money, Zinn."

"That's the idea, isn't it?"

McLeod felt an undercurrent of something he couldn't quite identify, overlaid with a feeling he recognized without any trouble at all. He didn't like Zinn.

To find him in the next bunk in the hut was a rude surprise. "That's Prentice's bunk, Zinn."

"Simon Legree assigned it to me. Said the guy who'd slept here was booted." He gave a sly grin which didn't reach to his eyes. "So we're neighbors, McLeod. Buddies."

It was the first McLeod had heard that Prentice was booted, but he wasn't surprised. Prentice just hadn't had it.



Sanders limped in, favoring his right leg. So he'd gotten hurt. A wild surge of joy swept over McLeod. Of all the men in the Camp, Sanders had given him the worst time, never failing to mention that the Games used to be open only to Hereds.

Sanders went past without a greeting, then checked. He hobbled over to Zinn's bunk, stared at the new man, then asked, "You Hered or Compet?"

For a moment which seemed to stretch to the breaking point, the new man made no answer. He let his eyes drift over Sanders, taking in the close cropped brown hair, the arrogant lift of the head, the trim, powerful body—and the visibly swelling ankle.

"I'm Zinn. And you're due to be booted, from the looks of that ankle." He gave that sly grin and asked, "What did you say they call you?"

McLeod saw the dull flush which stained Sanders' face, saw the muscles knot in his jaw, his fists clench. It was against the Rules to fight, except in regular training; so Sanders controlled his anger.

"New men learn in a hurry who I am," he ground out. "Sanders. Hered. Now, Zinn, I asked you a question. Are you Hered or Compet?"

"What does it matter? I'm good, that's all that counts." This with an arrogance to match Sanders' own. "Better have the Trainer look at the ankle. Unless

you're looking for a way out."

This time McLeod thought Sanders wouldn't be able to hold the punch. Fortunately the Trainer came in just then, took one look at Sanders' ankle, and ordered him into the rub down room for treatment.

"My, my, impressed with himself, isn't he? Sanders, he said. I noticed that he didn't even bother to speak to you, McLeod."

McLeod scowled. Zinn had touched on a very sore subject. "I'd take it easy with Sanders, if I were you."

"Because he's an Hered?" Zinn laughed. "And, I gather you're a Compet—hence the cold shoulder." Again he gave that sly smile. "Wondering what I am?"

McLeod knew what Zinn was—obnoxious. He didn't answer.

"Six weeks to go—we sweat, we strain, we toughen up the old muscles, we compete like mad—all so that we can have a chance to do our Work on Labor Day. Tell me, McLeod, do you think it's worth it?"

McLeod was shocked. He glanced around quickly to see whether or not any of the other men in the barracks had heard. Luckily most of them were down at one end of the long room, listening to Denning spin tales of other Labor Days. McLeod, as the only Compet in the barracks, had learned early in the training that he wasn't welcome at the bull sessions. They tolerated him be-

cause they had to—Competes were now legal, the government was even encouraging them with special grants to help in pre-Games training; but he wasn't accepted, and knew he never would be. For too many decades, only Hereds had been allowed into the Games. His father had no business of his own. McLeod had nothing to work toward, until the new law went into effect. Then he'd gone all out, winning the coveted opening for one Compet which each training camp now offered. Which answered Sanders' question about Zinn; one which needn't have been asked, had Sanders only been thinking. Zinn had to be Hered, or he wouldn't be here. Unless—unless, McLeod realized with a sudden knotting of his gut, he, himself, had been booted.

The fear was so all-enveloping that he didn't register Zinn's next question until the new man reached over, took hold of his arm in a painfully hard grip, and gave him a little shake.

"Well, do you think it's worth it? All the training, the emotional upheaval, the anguish—just to have a chance to Work?"

Shapped out of his reverie, McLeod yanked his arm from Zinn's grip. He didn't like to be touched.

"Would I be here if I didn't think it important? And let me give you some advice, Zinn; don't go airing such questions. That's heresy, and you know it."

Zinn made a mock obeisance.

"I worship at the altar of Work. I make my pilgrimage on Labor Day. Et cetera." Then he straightened up and leaned across the space which separated the bunks. "Honestly, McLeod, I think it's all highly over-rated. If the old man hadn't threatened to beat my head in if I didn't enroll, I'd have passed up the Games." He grinned, for once his long face youthful. "My old man's bigger than I am. I enrolled." Then with one of his lightning changes of mood, he gave McLeod the kind of look a scientist gives a new species of insect—interested but detached, impersonal. "You must 'be a Compet, the way you stay clear of them," and he jerked his head toward the group clustered around Denning. "You're the first Compet I've met. The one in West Coast Camp Three got booted before I even got a good look at him." His scrutiny was insulting.

"Why don't you go join your kind?" McLeod snapped. He was getting sick of the ostracism. So his father didn't own one of the giant work complexes. Everyone couldn't be an owner, an Hered. And according to the constitution, he was equal to the best of the Hereds.

"Don't be so spikey. It just is beyond me why anyone would bother with the Games if he didn't have a family tradition of Work, and a family pushing him to compete, take the prize, make it big this turn of the century

Labor Day.”

The bitterness in Zinn’s voice startled McLeod. All his life he’d envied the Hereds, wanted to enter the Games with such a fierce desire that it curled his gut in knots at times. When the government made its big announcement at the first of the year, opening the Games for the first time in history to non-Hereds, McLeod had vowed that he’d enter, he’d stay the entire training, and come out on top. He’d show the Hereds that others were able to Work, too. Even before the trials, he’d started training, toughening up already tough muscles. For years he’d played hard at everything, working out his resentments against the Hereds in the only physical activity open to him—Play. But now, finally, he had a chance, but only one chance. As a Compet, there was only one Job open to him. He had no family Work Complex to go to on Labor Day, to do his Honest Day’s Work. He had to win first place in the Games, for to the winner went the honor of working at the newest government installation in his city, the gigantic manufacturing plant which was to turn out parts for the prototype starship.

McLeod clenched his fists. He had to win. He had to beat Sanders, Denning, all of the Hereds. And now he had to beat Zinn.

II.

IN THE ENSUING DAYS, it became

all too obvious to McLeod that Zinn was his main competition. Each day the running scores were posted; and although Zinn had come in about fifty points behind him, he now had narrowed the lead to twenty three. McLeod began to worry. This year in which he came of age was the only year he’d be allowed to compete. There were no second chances in the Games. Either you won your right to do your Honest Day’s Work the first time round, or you spent the rest of your life in Play.

Lots of guys didn’t care. Many never bothered to enter, even the Hereds. They figured it was too hard.

Zinn, though, had an even more insidious type of argument. At times McLeod wished he had ear plugs, to shut out the flow of propaganda which issued from the sardonic face of his rival.

“I think it’s a hoax. I think it’s always been—someone started off this idea of what a great thing it is, even in our automated society, to work. And they devised the bit about doing your Honest Day’s Work on Labor Day. I’ll bet it won’t be anything, when the time comes. Here we sweat and train, to be ready for anything. Swinging a pick in a mine—chopping down a giant oak—operating one of those museum trucks that were obsolete a century ago.”

“That’s the idea,” McLeod said eagerly. “We don’t know what job we’ll be assigned. Wouldn’t it

humiliate you to be given a man's job, and not be able to handle it? I'd never be able to hold my head up again. My family would be disgraced. The whole city where I live is rooting for me—I'm the first one chosen from there to be in the Games. And it's the Centennial year, remember, with extra jobs available."

"And you want one." Zinn's sneer was pure Hered. "I still think we're in for the biggest gyp going."

"Then why work so hard, trying to beat me?"

Zinn gave that grin which McLeod was learning to hate. "I don't like to be second to anyone."

They began climbing the next day. It was the one thing McLeod feared, never having had a head for heights. Twice the Trainer blasted him loudly.

"The rope's for safety—not for hauling up lazy slobs who think they're good as anyone else. Climb, McLeod, no one's going to pull you up this rock face."

Burning with anger, McLeod forced himself to look up, never down, to pick handholds where none were to be found, to probe for hidden crevices in which to anchor his toes. When they reached the summit, he was dripping with sweat.

"Don't care for climbing?" It would have to be Zinn. "Listen." Zinn glanced carefully around him, then lowered his voice, talking almost without moving his

lips. "Let's cut. I've heard of a place where you can work without getting into Games. Real work. Man's work. That's why I transferred to the East. They leave from the city, near here. I'd vouch for you. You could go."

"Shut up, Zinn. You'd like that, wouldn't you?" he grated. "You'd like nothing better than for me to quit, leave the field all to you. Sanders is so far behind, now, that he couldn't catch you unless you broke a leg. No one's out in front but me." He thrust his face close to Zinn's. "And I'm going to stay in front of you."

Zinn just shrugged. "Like I say, with your ability, you're wasted on these Games. But, if you don't want to—no one's going to make you do it. Go ahead, win if you can—play your piddling game, pretend it's work. But out there," and he gazed off across the distant valley, "there's real work for real men. What'd'ye say? Shall we go?"

McLeod looked fearfully at his companion. "Keep it down, Zinn. Someone will hear you." Then he voiced a sudden, horrible suspicion. "You aren't taking zang, are you?"

"Now, do I look like a zanger to you? Come off it, McLeod. Everyone knows the symptoms." He held a hand under McLeod's nose. "No spots on the nails. No peeling of cuticle. Clean as a whistle. Just because I try to tell you there's a way of life better than this, that you can still find

places on this planet where men toil, do real, honest work, instead of this mockery, you set me up as a zang user."

"On your feet, on your feet. We rappel down the sheer face. Sanders—you first."

The Trainer's shout broke up the unwelcome conversation. McLeod was disturbed by what Zinn was saying. It was rank heresy, and he knew it; but somehow, it fired his imagination. If only it were true. He flexed an arm, proud of the ripple of muscles beneath the deeply tanned skin. Even as a boy, he'd been so full of ambition that he'd outstripped everyone in his peer group in all of their sports. And at that time, it was training without a purpose, for no one dreamed that the Hereds would ever allow anyone else to enter the Games. Work. A chance to work. It had been the unattainable grail of his waking thoughts, the dream of every sleep. McLeod had a recurrent nightmare in which he was finally given his chance to do an Honest Day's Work, only to fail. He would wake from the nightmare shaken and drained, dreading to go back to sleep lest he repeat his humiliation in yet another dream sequence.

He was so lost in thought that he rappelled down the cliff face without once feeling fear, to save his day's score from the disastrous low he had expected to get.

That night McLeod dreamed. He was in a forest full of tall,

stately pines which reached to the sky. In his hand was a tool he'd seen in the museums, a double edged steel head fitted with a shaped wooden handle. It was called an ax. Each time he swung the tool, to bite into the wood of the pine trees, the ax turned into a tennis racket, or a hockey stick, or a ball bat; and the tree laughed, a deep, nasty laugh, at the attempts of a puny man armed only with an implement of play, to demolish it.

McLeod woke, to find that it was still night. In the next bed, Zinn snored softly. It was hard for McLeod to get back to sleep. Was it true, what Zinn had told him? Was there still some place on earth where machines did not do all of the work? Could a man use his muscles for more than play—games?

He drifted into an uneasy slumber as the sky began to lighten.

When he woke to the sound of the morning gong, he found Zinn staring at him from the next bunk, the sly smile already on his wide awake face.

"Why don't you just give it up now, McLeod?" Zinn taunted. "Every day I pick up a point or two—I'll top the list before Labor Day. Pretend you've pulled a muscle in your back—save face. Better to go out on a med than to be booted."

"I'll not be booted."

"So you lose at the last moment—that'll be worse."

Anger surged through him. Kicking off the gray blanket, McLeod swung his feet to the floor so that he was facing away from Zinn. Then, over his shoulder, he snapped, "I don't intend to lose. I'm going to be the first Compet ever to do an Honest Day's Work."

"I told you where to go to use your muscles."

"If it's such a hot place, why aren't you there?" McLeod flared. "I don't see you cutting and running anywhere."

"Maybe I will, boy, maybe I will. But I just may wait until I beat you to that Honest Day's Work."

He tried, too; McLeod had to give Zinn credit for that. The guy was good. He came, obviously, from one of the more wealthy Hered families. He had spent his life in preparation for this big moment, his reflexes were fast, his control was superb, his strength was phenomenal.

III.

AS THE DAYS raced by, Zinn piled up more and more points. Some days McLeod managed a higher daily total; but more and more often, Zinn tied him, or topped his score. The lead continued to dwindle; and Zinn continued to needle him about being a Compet when he wasn't whispering his insinuations about the whole business being a hoax. That began to wear McLeod down. Tension was building to almost

unbearable levels, and the idea kept creeping into McLeod's thoughts—what if Zinn is right? What if this is a monumental farce?

But no, it couldn't be. In all the years of the Games, that kind of secret couldn't have been kept. Someone would have told.

Next time the sardonic master of the slippery tongue approached him, McLeod hit him with this fact.

Zinn shrugged. "It has been told. How else would I know about it? You don't think I dreamed it up myself, do you?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact, I do."

Zinn leaned over until his face was so close that McLeod saw only a blurred image. "Then why don't you report me to the Trainer, if you think I'm doing this just to throw off your timing?"

It was tempting; but McLeod knew he mustn't yield to the almost overpowering impulse to do just that. He knew that the Trainer was every bit as prejudiced as the members of the Camp against Compets. He never missed a chance to call attention to McLeod's faults, was always pleased if Sanders or Zinn topped him in the daily score. It was a closed club, with McLeod as the outsider, here only on sufferance. The Trainer would only write off any report on Zinn's heretic talk as bad sportsmanship on McLeod's part, a last minute try to have his severest competition

booted.

No, if McLeod won, it had to be on merit alone. He must try to ignore Zinn's taunts, his hints of a better place to live, his insinuations that the Games were at best a hollow triumph.

Then the last week was on them, and McLeod had only a five point lead over Zinn. This week was devoted to the most basic of all games, hand-to-hand combat. For years, for as long as he could remember, McLeod had practiced the finer points of such ancient arts as judo, karate, and the more modern, yet more brutal game called, simply, Kill. This was legalized murder, and everyone knew it. If, during this week's tests, you killed your opponent, it did not disqualify you, although it did not give you the top score for hand-to-hand. The object was to overpower as quickly as possible, preferably without lethal action; but if, in the course of play, someone died, it was not punishable.

When the postings were up, McLeod almost hated to look at the board. He knew that if he met Zinn in the first round, the contest would be the decisive one. Either he would best Zinn to win the Games, or he would lose—and if he lost to Zinn, something deep inside him, some atavistic sense, told him that the contest would end in death.

He was paired first, though, with a fellow named Holding, a short, wiry man with a shock of

long, wavy hair, very black. He wasn't in the same class with Zinn, Sanders, or even Denning. McLeod knew he could take him without any trouble. Glancing down the list, he saw that Zinn had drawn someone named Wilberforce, one McLeod didn't even know by sight.

The day went as expected. He won on points without any trouble. McLeod didn't even work hard at it. He knew that it wasn't illegal to kill his opponent; but he knew, also, in the Games, that only one Kill was allowed. If he killed this man, he'd have to be careful in future matches. For if he killed a second time, he was automatically booted. If he had used up his one Kill, then he'd have to hold back in more difficult matches; and that could be fatal. When you played Kill, you didn't dare hold back against a good opponent, or you'd wind up dead.

He saw that Zinn, too, had won on points; but in this event, McLeod had dropped two points to his rival. Sanders and Denning had won their matches, also, putting all four of them into the next rank. The way it was arranged, the final match would be the two top players, on the last day. If the scores were equal, or nearly so, then that last game of Kill would be the deciding factor in the competition.

Next day McLeod was pitted against a fellow who looked every inch his name of Rodriguez San Pedro Maria Jimenez y Aleman.

He could have stepped out of one of the ancient paintings McLeod had viewed on the Art-box. Tall, lithe, he was a formidable opponent. Within minutes, McLeod knew he was in real trouble. Jimenez moved in as fast as a fer de lance, and was as deadly. For one moment, McLeod felt panic well up into his throat. He'd have to kill this one, which would use up his one allowed Kill. If he met Zinn later, he'd be hampered by having to exercise caution. Just at that moment, though, by a lucky move, he tripped Jimenez, who fell off balance, heavily. From the gasp, McLeod knew that his opponent was injured. By rules, this made no difference. It was his privilege to move in for the kill; or for the complete control which would win the game on points for McLeod. It would be on points. With Jimenez injured, he could take him without having to kill him.

As he moved, Jimenez cried, "Yield!", much to McLeod's surprise. He'd figured the Spaniard as one who would rather die than acknowledge defeat.

It was only after the Trainers came that McLeod learned his opponent had broken a vertebra in his fall, and faced a possible lifetime of paralysis.

He didn't care. That was part of the Games. You knew when you entered that you might suffer injury, permanent disablement, even death. If you had any guts at all, this made no difference to

you. All that mattered was the chance to win, to do your Honest Day's Work:

The yield gave McLeod extra points which helped; because when the scores were posted for the day, he found that Zinn had done extremely well against his opponent, so that he now tied McLeod for first place.

But now the camp had narrowed down to four men still in the Games: McLeod, Zinn, Sanders and Denning, all in the same bunkhouse. That night tension was so high that the room crackled. As men lost, they were booted. They were not even allowed to stay at the camp to watch the final matches. So, except for the four of them, and the officials, the camp was deserted.

As it had been for the entire training period, the others, all Hereds, left McLeod alone. There was no fraternizing, even from Zinn. And no further needling about dropping out, running off to the never-never land which Zinn had hinted at so strongly when he first arrived.

On the following day, McLeod drew Denning, while Zinn and Sanders were paired. McLeod figured himself lucky, because Sanders had been, from the beginning, a more formidable opponent than Denning. In fact he had expected Denning to be booted long before this point. He knew he could take Denning on points, saving his kill for the finals. And he knew, even before the after-

noon match between Zinn and Sanders, that Zinn would win. Sanders, hadn't ever quite recovered from the leg injury which slowed him down.

This was to be the first time McLeod had a chance to watch Zinn's technique in Kill, as his morning's match with Denning had given Zinn an opportunity to study him. Denning was dismissed immediately after he lost. Lunch was tense, with no talk whatsoever, as Zinn and Sanders were too keyed up to be civil to each other, and neither man chose to bother with McLeod.

He burned, but silently. He'd win. He'd take Zinn tomorrow, if he had to kill him. He'd show the whole country that a Compet could do it, could achieve just as much as the Hereds. News had filtered in about other Camps; and McLeod knew, now, that he was the only Compet left in the Games. If he didn't win, they would quite possibly close the Games to Compets again. But if he won—if he won—

He took a seat where he could watch the Kill match closely. If it had been allowed, he'd have filmed the contest between Zinn and Sanders, to study all evening.

What he saw was disturbing. Zinn had all of the skill which Jimenez had displayed before his accident; plus something more. Something indefinable, but obvious. For the first time McLeod had a premonition that he might lose. Zinn was good; but he was

up against tough competition with Sanders, whose heavy build gave him strength against Zinn's speed. McLeod watched every move, every nuance of technique, hoping to find the flaw which would give him an advantage over his opponent tomorrow.

Then it happened. It was so fast that McLeod almost missed it. Sanders fell, and Zinn moved in to finish the match. He got a winning hold on Sanders; but he met no opposition. Suspecting a trick, Zinn froze. Nothing happened. McLeod heard the Trainer shout, "Kill!" and Zinn still stayed there as if changed to stone.

Now the Trainer moved into the ring. "Let go, Zinn. Your man is dead."

"Dead: He can't be. I don't have a lethal hold on him."

The Trainer held the indicator at eye level. "He's dead. You win on a Kill."

Stunned, Zinn loosed his hold and rose slowly. "I don't understand," he muttered. "I couldn't have killed him."

"Probably heart," the Trainer said laconically.

Hope lit Zinn's face. "Then I didn't kill him? I still have a Kill coming?" He looked across at McLeod, then, and cold chills slid down McLeod's spine.

"It's a Kill," the Trainer judged. "A man dies in the game, it's a Kill for his opponent."

Hope drained from Zinn's face; but now it surged through McLeod. With his Kill used up,

Zinn would have to spare him.

Then Zinn asked a question which put ice in McLeod's gut, the words were so cold-blooded, the look that went with them so devoid of feeling.

"So I've had my one Kill. What happens, though, if I kill McLeod in the finals tomorrow? There are only two of us left. I'd have to be the winner, wouldn't I?"

The Trainer shook his head. "Two kills disqualify."

"But," Zinn argued almost desperately, "there'd be no one left, then."

The Trainer's shoulders rose and fell. "You'd be disqualified. There'd be no winner from Camp One. That's all. So if you plan to win, you'll have to do it on points."

McLeod's spirits rose. Zinn had to do it on points; but he could still kill his opponent. And if he had to, he would. McLeod wasn't going to lose, not after he'd come this far. On Labor Day, he intended to be the man from Camp One who had the privilege of doing an Honest Day's Work.

IV.

THE CAMP was eerie, now, with only the two of them left. The empty barracks echoed as they returned to it after a silent meal. McLeod wished he could move his bunk, get away from Zinn; but he discovered that while they'd been out, not only had the extra bunks been stripped of bedding, the bunks themselves had been

unbolted from the floor, dismantled, and removed.

He'd have gone out, but there was no place to go. He and Zinn were as attached, tonight, as Siamese twins who had learned to hate each other.

Suddenly Zinn turned to him and began talking. There was an odd look on his face, a kind of fanatical gleam, and his voice was so low that McLeod had to strain to hear the words which poured from his lips in a turbulent stream.

"Quit now, McLeod. If you don't, I promise that I'll kill you tomorrow if I have to. I'm not going to lose. I'd rather disqualify on a second Kill than to let you win. But if you'll duck out, let me win by default, I'll tell you where they're leaving from—the workers—on Labor Day. It's set for then as a final gesture, a real thumb of the nose, to the Games and the hollow victory of winning the chance to do an Honest Day's Work. I came East to be near the point of departure. If you'll lam out, you can go to a place where men work all day, every day—real, hard, hand-callusing work, work to make you proud. No sham. No nonsense. Just the kind of work our great-grandfathers did as a matter of course. It was their right and privilege to toil, to earn a living, not to play forever except for the biggest hoax of all, Labor Day."

In spite of himself, McLeod listened. He couldn't help it. He

knew that it was all lies, that Zinn was just working on him psychologically, trying to get him to quit because he was too much of a threat. Yet he listened.

"Okay, so where is this place?"

There was a crafty gleam in Zinn's pale eyes. He shook his head. "Uh uh. No soap. I don't tell you until you leave."

"Come on, now, what kind of a fool do you take me for, Zinn? You expect me to trust you? I leave before I know about where it is—how do I find out?"

"I've thought of that. I have it all written out—it's in my strong box with your name on it. If you'll go, I'll take you as far as the fence—once you're out, I'll pass the directions to you."

McLeod knew that, with the place guarded as it was, once he was outside, there'd be no coming back.

"You'd like that, wouldn't you, Zinn? Do you know what I think? You're yellow—you're scared of tomorrow. You know I haven't used up my Kill yet, and you are afraid that I'll finish you off permanently." He forced his tense facial muscles into a travesty of a grin. "Well, if I have to, I will. Believe that, Zinn. You've told me you intend to kill me. You'll never get the chance. I intend to live, to win, and nothing you can say will change it." He let the grin fade. "What happens if I go now to the Trainer, accuse you, have you disqualified for heresy?"

Was it a flicker of fear he saw

in Zinn's blue eyes? If so, it was gone almost as soon as it came.

"Go ahead." Zinn shrugged. "Try it. See how far you get. Who'll believe you, a Compet? They'll demand proof, and then where will you be? I deny it, they believe me, then you're out; because you know the penalty for false accusation."

McLeod knew. Booting. Then he remembered something, and tested the sweet triumph of victory. "But I do have proof. You just told me that the directions for getting to this so-called Heaven of Work are locked into your strong box. I demand it be opened—there is the proof."

For a minute Zinn looked at him, eyes expressionless. Then he threw back his head and laughed raucously. "Almost had you, didn't I, McLeod? Had you going. Almost had you convinced about going to that never-never land where you can do an honest day's work every day. What kind of fool do you take me for—writing out such stuff, indeed. Leaving myself wide open for denunciation. Maybe you Compets operate on such stupid wave lengths; but Hereds are by the very fact of their heredity, cleverer than Compets. Or hadn't you caught on to that, yet? You must admit, it was a good try, wasn't it? I nearly convinced you."

For one awful moment McLeod saw red; his muscles responded to the surge of adrenalin in his bloodstream, almost throwing his

body into a lunge at Zinn. Almost, but not quite. It would have been a fatal lunge; for the punishment meted out to the attacker in a personal brawl during the Games was the ever-present spectator, booting.

The crisis passed. Without another word, McLeod turned his back on his temptor, crawled into his bunk, and feigned sleep. Long after lights out, though, he lay there, tense and angry, when he should have been sleeping. If this was what Zinn hoped to accomplish with his needling, then he had succeeded. Finally McLeod dropped off into the troubled slumber fraught with disturbing dreams.

V.
WHEN MORNING CAME, he was not rested; but one look at his opponent showed that Zinn, too, had passed a bad night. Zinn didn't speak, nor did he. This was the last day, perhaps the last day of life for one of them.

Breakfast done, the compulsory rest period over, the two finalists met in the Games arena. There was no need for the Trainer to read the rules which by now were indelibly etched in their minds.

Now that the time had come, McLeod was unafraid, confident of victory. He had tried so hard. Today would be the justification for his whole life. He looked at Zinn, across the arena from him, and felt nothing. No hate, no compassion, no emotion of any

kind. The black haired, pale eyed man might be a robot for all McLeod cared. All he felt was the enormous surge of confidence which washed away the fatigue of the restless night, the doubts which Zinn had tried to instill in his mind, and the fears he had that Zinn would kill him.

The Trainer's whistle sounded, and McLeod moved forward into the arena, circling warily, crouched in the first Kill position, ready for any move, any opening his opponent might offer.

The contest was over almost before it began. Zinn came at him with a rush, his intent obvious. He was out to disable McLeod in the opening moments of play, if possible. It was a clever gambit which might have succeeded; but McLeod was ready for death, and recognized its face. With muscles tuned to a ballet dancer's pitch, he sidestepped the rush, delivering a chop at his opponent's neck as he brushed past him. The blow connected with that once in a lifetime accuracy which every player dreams of but never expects to happen to him.

Zinn's momentum carried him on a few steps, but he was walking dead.

"Kill!"

McLeod was numbed by the Trainer's shout. He had come into this arena only minutes before, prepared for a long, agonizing bout with Zinn. He knew he could be maimed or even killed. Now it was over, and the taste of

victory was ashes in his mouth.

He couldn't look at the dead man. He'd come into the final game ready to kill Zinn if necessary; but he hadn't meant to do it. He was sure he could win on points. It was a hollow victory.

There was no applause for him from the Trainer nor from the judges. He had won the Games fairly; but they looked at him as if he had committed some crime. Yesterday, when Zinn had killed Sanders, there had been no such attitude. Zinn was an Hered. Today, when he had overcome the final opposition, McLeod learned that to everyone left at the Camp, he was still an outsider, a rank upstart, who had no standing with them whatsoever.

They had to give him his certificate, of course. He had won, and there was no way they could cheat him of that. But they let him see that they begrudged him that honor.

IF HE WAS despised by the officials of the Games, he was given honor and adulation by his home city. A delegation had waited outside the Camp each day of this final week of Kill, eager for news of his standing. When McLeod left the Camp, he found, clustered at the gates, a crowd of nearly one hundred eager, jostling people, with the number rapidly swelling as word was sent out that their Compet had won the Games from Eastern Camp One.

As McLeod walked out, the

waiting crowd burst into a roar of approval that startled him with its intensity. He was seized by a group of stalwart youths, all friends with whom he had played for years, and raised to their shoulders. Then he was carried triumphantly away from the bitterness of the Camp to the sweet taste of victory.

When he saw the proud faces beneath him, when he heard the cries of, "McLeod! McLeod! McLeod!" he finally felt the way he had expected to feel if he won.

Then he was taken home to his waiting family. McLeod held his head high and walked with king-steps as if he wore a crown.

His mother wept. His father stood there, emotion choking his voice, so that he could only murmur, "Angus, Angus, lad." There was no envy on the faces of his younger brothers, Douglas and Wallace; only overwhelming pride.

Only his sister, Lorna, seemed able to talk. "We've all been invited to the Labor Day ceremonies," she bubbled. "Imagine that. At the new starship plant. We'll be allowed to see you do your Honest Day's Work."

As he saw the love and admiration in the faces of his family, McLeod could almost convince himself that Zinn's death had been worth it.

Later, though, when his kid brother, Douglas, asked him, "How does it feel to kill a man, Angus?" McLeod felt once again

that bleak moment when he'd heard the Trainer shout, "Kill!"

"Rotten, Doug, rotten."

His brother gave him an anguished look, as if he had been betrayed, and asked no more details of the Games. The bloom was off victory, now.

That night McLeod dreamed that Zinn was across the Arena from him, moving in fast. Then McLeod's foot slipped in the clean, white sand, and Zinn was on him, catching him in the vertebral hold which would break his back if more pressure were applied. Through teeth clenched in a grinning, death's head mask, Zinn hissed, "Yield, McLeod, yield." McLeod woke with a strangled cry to find himself drenched with cold sweat.

For hours he lay in his narrow bed, sleepless, afraid to close his eyes again lest he dream of the pale eyed devil, Zinn.

Finally he dozed off into fitful slumber, only to jerk awake several times, just as he again faced Zinn across the Arena.

Morning began Labor Day Eve, with its rounds of festivity and merry making. McLeod went through it like a puppet, with his family pulling the strings. He pasted a painful smile on his face; but from the unhappy looks his father gave him during the day, McLeod knew that he wasn't fooling anyone. At each party he honored, the gaiety soon curdled, and the guests were glad to speed him on his way to the next feast,

which he, in turn, ruined.

His father drew him aside. "What is it, son?" but he was unable to answer.

"Don't fret," his mother cautioned hurriedly. "He's just worn out from the Games, tense in preparation for his Honest Day's Work, tomorrow."

"That's right," McLeod agreed; but he knew it was a lie, and so did she, and so did his father.

That night as he retired, his mother brought him a small, red capsule. "To help you sleep," she explained, shamefaced. When had he ever, before, had trouble sleeping? But McLeod took it and thanked her. He'd gone this far. Now, to uphold the honor of his family and all of the Compets in the land, he had to get through Labor Day. He needed sleep.

VI.

MCLEOD WAS DRESSED in the official Working Man's uniform of blue denim shirt, dungarees, safety-toed shoes, and blue, billed cap when the visitor arrived. His mother had just handed him his symbolic lunch bucket, shiny black, with his name engraved on the lid. He stood there, surrounded by his family, when the doorbell sounded. His father went, and came back, a frown on his face.

"Someone to see you, Angus. He said it was important—but he wouldn't set foot inside the door. I tried to tell him it was a bad time for visitors, that you were

ready to go to Work; but he insisted—and there's something about him—" His voice dwindled off.

Some of his father's distress communicated itself to McLeod. Reluctantly he said, "I'll see him."

Before he got to the door, he knew whom he'd see.

There stood an older version of Rafe Zinn, tall, black hair touched with gray, the same bleak, cold, pale eyes. The long, sardonic face was twisted with hate.

McLeod stood there, inside the house, looking at the man on the doorstep.

"Why didn't you die? Why didn't you have the decency to let my son kill you?" The mouth was pulled into a travesty of a smile. "Congratulations, Compet." Then he thrust an envelope at McLeod. "From my son. It was in his strong box. As it is for you, take it—I want no part of it."

Mechanically McLeod reached for it, then realized he had in his hand the Working Man's lunch-box. When Zinn saw this, his face almost crumpled. "Scum!" and he dropped the letter on the stoop, turned, and strode away, stiff-backed, frozen with grief.

McLeod stood there, staring at the uncompromising back, until the elder Zinn was out of sight. Then, slowly he stooped and retrieved the letter. On the front was written: *In the event of my death, this is to be given to Angus McLeod.* Signed, Rafael Zinn, Jr.

He turned it over in his hands, unwilling to break the seal, open it, read its contents.

There was a light touch on his arm, and his mother asked, "What is it, son?"

Turning blind eyes in her direction, McLeod opened his mouth, forced out the words, "Just a letter," and then turned back to the envelope.

"Hadn't you better read it? It's nearly time to go. The official car will be here in five minutes to take us to the starship plant. Remember, Work starts promptly at eleven, so that you can get in the full hour before lunch."

He took a deep breath, then said, "Of course, mother." He pushed the lunch box into her hands, deliberately turned his back on her, and with trembling fingers broke the seal stamped with the 'H' for Hered.

"If you read this, it will be because you've killed me. It's not too late, yet, McLeod. They're leaving from Joe's Candy Shop, corner of Whittier and First, at twelve noon sharp, Labor Day. If you really want to work, go there, show them this letter, and tell them you're replacing me at my request. Don't be late. They won't wait. Rafe Zinn."

So Zinn hadn't lied, after all. The address had been ready, in his strong box, McLeod's for the asking. If he'd left the Camp then, before the final contest, Zinn would now be alive. But he hadn't.

"What is it?" his mother asked timidly.

"Nothing," was his harsh reply as he tore the letter into shreds and then crumpled them in his hand. He made a show of looking at the time. "When's that car coming, anyway? I don't want to be late to Work."

IT WAS MORE THAN just the official aircar which came. A long procession of vehicles followed, full of city dignitaries. There were even Hereds there, putting up a good front, even though it must have galled them to see a Compet allowed to Work.

McLeod was ushered into the lead car, his family herded into the next car in line. Uniformed Games officials roared off in the lead, mounted on single-seater air scooters. Sirens wailed, crowds cheered, and McLeod felt, finally, the surge of joy which had been denied him by Zinn, Senior.

The procession wound through the streets of the city, into the suburbs, and finally into the industrial park which extended for miles. A new road, freshly marked for the aircars, led to the vast complex housing the government installation, the starship factory, which was to officially open today.

Now McLeod wondered, as he had in the past weeks, what would be required of him. His muscles were hard but pliant, his reflexes lightning fast, his eyes keen. He was ready for any phys-

ical endeavor, no matter how arduous.

The lead car drew up before the gate of the starship factory just as a whistle blew a long, lonely note.

The official seated in the front seat of the aircar turned slightly. "The eleven o'clock starting whistle. We're right on schedule."

They got out of the car, marched to the gate, and McLeod was given, by the guard in the guardhouse, a metal badge with the number '1' on it. Then the gates swung open, and McLeod was ushered into the hallowed Work precincts.

Here a delegation, headed by the Secretary of Labor, himself, greeted McLeod.

The Secretary, a fussy little man with gray hair, made a lengthy speech which was only faintly political in tone. He concluded with these stirring words:

"Angus McLeod, as winner of the Games from Eastern Camp One, you are entitled to do your Honest Day's Work here at the new government starship factory. As the first Compet ever to Work, we wish you great success on this Labor Day in the Year of our Lord 2100."

The full two hundred voice choir from the Cathedral of the Church of the Living God burst into the ancient hymn, "Work, for the Night Is Coming."

Then, at its conclusion, the massed Armed Services bands struck up the stirring strains of,

"Heigh Ho, Heigh Ho, It's Off to Work We Go," the traditional Labor Day march.

Conducted by the Secretary of Labor, McLeod marched solemnly along toward his destiny, sure, now, that he would acquit himself honorably.

Up the steps to the main building they marched, with all the dignitaries and McLeod's family following behind. The doors opened in front of them, and McLeod walked into an enormous room with a raised dais in the center. All about the room were banks of silent machinery with dials, unlighted bulbs, and silent wheels extending endlessly.

A hush fell over the crowd. Then the Secretary motioned McLeod forward. Slower and slower McLeod moved toward the dais, not sure what was expected of him. He reached it and stepped up on the platform. As he did so, a spotlight came on in the vast ceiling overhead, and brilliantly picked out a pedestal on the dais. On this pedestal was what appeared to be a push button made of shining steel.

Not knowing what he was to do, McLeod just stood there, while a hush of expectancy fell over the crowd. When the moment dragged out too long, he heard a low-voiced mutter beside him.

It was Mr. Secretary. "Push the button, you fool." Then, in an aside to his aide, "I wasn't ever in favor of allowing Compets to

Work. Haven't any know how."

Stung into action, McLeod raised his hand, only to realize that it was the hand still clutching his lunch box. Hastily transferring the box to his left hand, he fumbled and almost dropped it. The silence in the vast room was a living force, now hostile and disapproving. Squaring his shoulders, on the defensive, McLeod reached forward and pushed the button firmly.

Immediately the whole room came to life, lights flashed, dials spun, wheels whirled; and over it all came a shout of applause from those gathered to watch him Work.

Still at a loss to know what came next, McLeod stood there until he sensed, rather than saw, the disapproving glare of the Secretary of Labor.

With an abrupt gesture, the Secretary motioned McLeod down from the platform. Then, turning on the phoniest of smiles, he spoke into the microphone which his aide thrust in front of his face.

"Congratulations, Angus McLeod, on the successful completion of your Honest Day's Work." He stuck out his hand, gave McLeod's hand a perfunctory shake, then turned away. McLeod heard him say to the aide, who had put the microphone away, "Glad that's over. Time for early lunch."

The crowd surged forward to offer congratulations to McLeod;

but every face turned into a long, sardonic one from which pale eyes taunted him. He could hear no words of praise, only the hurried, whispered hints of the dead Zinn. "It's a hoax—all a hoax. But I know a place where a man can do work—real work."

With a sound half between a sob and a snarl, McLeod looked at his watch. Eleven forty. He might still have time to make it.

"Let me through, let me through," he pleaded to the well-wishers crowding about him. When they didn't open a path for him, McLeod suddenly went berserk. Swinging the shiny black lunch box in a vicious arc in front of him, he cleared a space and began moving rapidly through the crowd who backed off hastily when they saw his face and his weapon.

"He's mad."

"The emotional strain of the Games has made him crack."

"They should never have let Compets into—"

But he ignored them, he even pushed past his father who stood, bewildered, in his way. All McLeod could think of was the fact that he had to get out of here, he had to get back to the city, to the corner of Whittier and First, before noon.

Then he was out of the building, racing down the steps and along the way which led to the gate. The guard watched him as he ran outside, not trying to stop him until he saw McLeod leap

onto one of the air scooters which had led the cavalcade. McLeod ignored the warning shouts, gunned the machine to life, and executed the tightest turn he'd ever attempted on a scooter. Then he was roaring back down the road, past the other industrial complexes, through the increasing traffic of the suburbs, and into the heart of the city. Here he threw all caution to the winds and touched the button which controlled the siren. Aircars lifted suddenly to get out of his way as he careened wildly through crowded streets.

McLeod didn't even know where he was going, except for a general direction. He hit First, and had to slow down to watch for the intersection with Whittier. The workers would leave from a candy shop there. He couldn't look at his watch to check the time, because he had to watch the traffic, watch for the candy shop, watch out for pedestrians.

Suddenly the air was shattered by a loud hooting—the Twelve O'Clock Whistle, still blown traditionally on Labor Day to remind men that it was time to stop Work. He was too late—but still McLeod kept on going, block after block. Then he saw the sign—Whittier. He'd made it. Stopping with a swoosh of air, McLeod catapulted himself from the seat of the scooter, nearly knocked over a man who got in his way, and rushed into the dim interior of Joe's Candy Shop.

(cont. on page 123)

Immortality is all very well—until you have to endure it . . .

DOMINION

KEN WISMAN

Illustrated by TONY GLEESON

THE MACHINE: *It administers drugs. It narcotizes the subject and the person for whom the illusion is cast, creates a fantasy adding reality through the unreality of drugs.*

Summer. The house is silent, dark. A storm rages outside, an August storm born in an August heat. Lightning flashes through the unlit house, thunder breaks the quiet.

Grace, alone, lies in her bedroom, waiting.

Against the window pane the summer storm settled into a light cooling rain.

It is a hypnotizer. It casts an illusion, creating an environmental surrounding conducive to the effect desired.

The doorbell rings. Grace knows who it is. Racing down the steps, she opens the door. He smiles, shy, unsure. She smiles back and invites him in.

They talk. She gives him a soda and takes one for herself.

Grace brings him upstairs to the bedroom where the phonograph is. Backs against the side of the bed they sit listening.

He kisses her suddenly, a slow tentative kiss.

It is a shaper. It makes the skin malleable, molds to conform to the image desire, programs the subject to enact a specific set of personality characteristics.

She explores his lips with her own. His hands are large, fumbling.

He stands awkwardly trying to hide his nakedness. It is a body tan and flat with summer swims and hikes, a body smooth and hairless, fourteen years old.

Because he is ashamed Grace closes her eyes, holds her arms out to him. He walks quietly to the bed, sits and kisses her. Giggling, they roll together over the bed, unmindful of sweating profusely in the humid air.

She feels the stab of sudden pain. She doesn't want it to fade and holds onto the feeling.

With head turned she lies dripping tears onto the sheets. He brings her eyes to face his.

"I'm—I'm—" he tries to apologize. She senses this.

"I'm crying because I'm happy, Billy."

"I love you."

The vision fades, the drug ebbs, the hypnotist snaps his fingers.

White and sterile the apartment replaces the old wooden house. Standing at the foot of the bed, her husband Jon emerges from the young boy. But the sweat glistening on her body remains, the tear stained sheets.

"WAS IT GOOD?" Asked her husband.

She didn't answer.

"Tomorrow will you be someone for me?"

Her head remained turned away.

"Tomorrow?"

She nodded yes.

"Grace? The boy. You've asked for him quite a lot the past year."

His wife remained silent.

"Did you love him?"

"I suppose." She loves more than the boy.

"How old were you?"

"Fourteen." She loves the time.

"That was long ago. How can you remember so well?"

"I don't know." She is in love with an era, with a time before the city and before the machine.

A WEEK LATER Jon, returning from his cubicle in the viewer building, found Grace crying in the bedroom.

"What is it?"

"I want to die." She said it emotionlessly.

"Have you seen the doctor?"



"How did you find out?" It hadn't been her husband who had suggested she see the psychiatrist, but a directive of the city. Jon was not sensitive to her moods; Grace did not blame him. If there had been any love between them it had been numbed by the years, prevented from maturing by the city. Like all the couples she knew, their relationship was centered around the machine; they used one another to play parts in each other's fantasies, and remained strangers.

"I was informed. What does he say?"

"He doesn't have to say anything, Jon. I feel smothered, as though I can't breathe. This city—"

"I know, Grace. You hate the city. You hate the walls, the buildings, the—"

"Could we ask permission to leave? Can we go away?" Grace stared up at him.

"What will that solve? What will running away do? The city is a wonderful place. You have all you want here, anything you desire. When you realize it's a good place again you'll forget your foolish ideas. Leaving won't solve a thing. You have to stay and face your problems."

Grace turned away from her husband. "You don't understand, do you? My problem is not that I want to die. I'm a century and a half old, Jon. I'm kept alive through this damned city. Drugs are in the water we drink, in the

air we breathe. There's no diseases here, no viruses, no germs. No accidents. The city protects us from everything."

"What's wrong with that?"

"It's a conspiracy."

"A what?" Exclaimed her husband. "Kept from dying is conspiracy. You're talking crazy again."

"I've outlived my proper time, Jon."

"Don't be ridiculous."

"It's like your stomach telling you that you're hungry. or your brain saying it needs sleep. My body whispers to me, you've lived your life, it's time to rest, to make room for someone else."

Her husband laughed. "Make room for whom? No one is born any more."

"It's time for me to die, Jon. I can't live in a smothering world, in a body that is ready for death." She glanced into his face. It was the first time she had ever seen her husband look frightened.

"Your mood will pass, Grace. It always has." He went to the bureau and pushed several buttons on the top. A small black box appeared. Jon turned, holding a needle gun. "It *will* pass, but we have to take precautions. This will protect you from your thoughts."

"No," she said, squirming to the other side of the bed. He was too quick for her. The chemical preventative shot through her skin, into her veins and coursed through her body.

"Only a precaution, dear. Now rest, please rest."

Grace lay still and awake the entire night.

THE FOLLOWING DAY when her husband had gone, Grace, who had feigned sleep, stole into the bathroom. Addressing the mirror, she asked for a razor blade. Immediately the metal sliver popped out from the medicine cabinet. She brought it to her wrist, but her hand faltered when the cold metal touched her skin.

Asking for a bottle of tranquilizers she tried swallowing the tiny blue pills, but her arm fell paralyzed at her side after chewing the second.

Grace stared from the window ten stories up in the huge apartment complex. Ordering it to open, she leaned out precariously. The motor action went unimpaired by the chemical preventative, her mind knew the outcome, there was no danger.

According to the city's directive, the area at the point of impact broke into a rectangle and dropped. Into the bowels of the earth Grace plummeted until the rectangle of softened material slowed ever so slightly, matching her speed, catching her and gradually halting her descent. Gears shifted and she rose into the light of the city.

"THERE'S A PARTY tonight," Jon said casually over the dinner table. Grace continued to eat without saying a word. "All your friends will be there. You haven't

seen them in quite awhile, Grace."

"I don't want to go."

"It might do you some good to get out."

"I don't want to go." She said it listlessly, and her husband took it to mean she needed more convincing.

"We haven't been out together in a long time." He looked over at her for signs of assent. "It should be fun. You used to like talking with the other wives. There'll be entertainment."

There was always entertainment. The city took care of most work, freeing everyone to pursue their hobbies and talents. Grace had sung at one time, and her voice was a cut above the usual amateurish talents people displayed. But she hadn't sung in several years.

"One night isn't asking much," said Jon.

"I want to be alone tonight." She needed time to think, to conceive of a plan.

"If you don't go I won't either."

Grace got up and pushed a button on the side of the circular table. Slowly, the tabletop lowered carrying its load of dirty dishes and glasses. Tomorrow the dishes would reappear, holding their breakfast meal of eggs or pancakes or whatever synthetic meal the city decided to provide.

Jon changed his tack: "They're saying pretty soon you won't even have to press the button. The table will know automatically

when you're done."

Grace laughed.

"Come with me tonight," pressed her husband.

Grace exited the kitchen. Light flooded the living room as she walked through, bathed the bedroom in soft glows when she entered. Jon followed.

"What are you doing?" He asked.

"Selecting a dress." Robot hands unzipped the garment she was wearing, opened the closet to bring forth a black sequined gown for her inspection.

"Yes," she sighed without looking. The robot arms slipped the silky material over her head.

"You'll go?" Jon asked tentatively.

"Yes."

THEY RODE the escalator down, exited into the street and stepped onto a slow roller that brought them to a corner.

"Taxirob," Jon said aloud.

Grace looked up at the facades of the surrounding buildings. She had not left the apartment in a week; during that time the city had altered its colors. From the roof of the overhead dome, light sprayed dazzlingly on bright pinks and violets. The city diversified the hues of its buildings, its streets and ramps every year or so. Grace wondered how long it would take for people to become bored with the monotony of the change.

A long sleek cab, silver in the

city's light, glided silently to the corner and lowered a ramp. As Jon and Grace walked up a group of people called to them.

"Mind if we share?"

"Of course not," replied Jon, and the group of five, three men, two women, danced up the ramp behind them.

When everyone had settled Jon asked, "Where?"

"The pleasure center."

"Where else?" Said one of the women, adding a tinkling laugh.

Jon smiled. "Sections two and seven." The taxirob sped off through the city.

Turning to Jon, one of the men queried, "Where to?"

"A party."

"Dull," replied the woman with the tinkling laugh. "Why don't you join us?" In a high delicate voice she began to sing a popular drinking song. Her companions chimed in.

"Brim my cup

With pleasure wine . . ."

Jon sipped from the flask they passed around then joined in the song.

"Drink to life's

Delights sublime . . ."

A musical note sounded, signaling the first stop. With a whisper the ramp lowered. Rising, Grace and Jon turned to go.

"Sure you won't join us?"

"Some other time. Thanks just

the same," Jon replied.

"If it really gets dull you know where to find us."

Facing around on the corner, Jon waved to the revellers. A tinkling laugh drifted from the plush interior before the ramp hissed shut. The taxiob glided away.

The apartment, high atop one of the tallest city buildings, emptied out onto a square patch of roof. A carpet of grass, shrubs and flowers grew in the open area.

Grace sat alone in the garden staring upward, trying to see past the shimmering light of the dome. She thought she saw tiny objects falling against the thick plastic, perhaps snow or a spring rain.

"There you are," said a voice from the apartment doorway.

Grace lowered her gaze.

A tall buxom woman walked into the garden trailing four others behind. They sat in lawn chairs scattered on the grass.

"How've you been, Grace?" asked the tall woman.

"Fine. And you, Clara?"

"You know me."

"Clara," called one of the women from the garden's edge. "Look at this."

Clara walked over to her.

"It's so high," said the woman, a frail blonde named Bo. "There's just dots down there, moving dots. It feels so strange looking down." She giggled. "What was it like before the city?"

"You'd best ask Grace. She's got ten years even on me."

The women laughed.

"Grace, is it true at seventy-five I'd be wrinkled and old?" questioned Bo.

"Yes."

"What an idea."

"We didn't even have the machine when we were girls. Did we Grace?" Clara walked back to the chair.

"What an idea!" exclaimed Bo. "What was it like?"

"You had to walk about suppressing yourself," Clara replied in a mock tone.

The women laughed.

Bo turned from the roof's edge and came to sit in the grass between Clara and Grace. "What do you mean?"

"Suppression and repression were the name of the game. If you wanted to get along in the world you couldn't indulge in everything you desired."

Bo ran her palm lightly across the blades of grass. She looked up quizzically.

"You dear," smiled Clara. "Let's say years ago I saw your beautiful husband, met him at a party like this and fell instantly in love with him. If I wanted to avoid social condemnation I'd have to avoid your husband. Now, if I wanted him all I need do is tell the machine, feed it his image, his personality profile and such. I can have him any time with no fuss or bother."

"Did people, before the machine, always control their desires?" Asked Bo.

Clara laughed. "Of course not, dear. And it caused a lot of turmoil too."

Bo plucked out a strand of grass, placed it between her teeth. "Last night I was Danae. I've been reading about the Greek myths and I wondered what it would be like to be made love to by a god. The shower of gold, Zeus - it was - it was -"

Clara arched her eyebrows comically. "Heavenly?"

The women laughed.

Sighing, Clara said, "It is a wonderful machine."

"It's a puppet master," interrupted Grace.

Bo stared at her questioningly. "A what?"

"It pulls you along on electric strings, throws its own voice through your mouth."

"Not really, Grace," said Clara. "You program it yourself, write your own script. But you know, Bo, I've got you beat." Her voice lowered to a conspiratorial whisper. "I've been a fan of the classics myself. Perhaps we older ones are a bit coarser." She winked at Grace. "You know the story of Pasaphae, who disguised herself as a cow. I wanted to try it once even if only to see my husband bellow like a bull."

The women laughed.

"Clara," said a woman, bringing her chair closer to the group. "I know someone who programs her husband to be DeSade every night."

"You, dear?"

"No, but I may try it shortly. It sounds intriguing."

"See what I mean?" Clara said. "The machine allows everything, within reason of course. It fulfills wishes and fantasies. When I was a young lady all these things—bestiality, sadism—were considered perversions. You suppressed them and wound up with a neurosis."

"What month is it?" Asked Grace suddenly.

"I don't know, dear. September I think." Clara stared at her for a moment. "That's another thing the city has taken care of. Remember how we used to shiver in the cold, Grace?"

"I've never seen snow," said Bo.

You've never been outside the city in seventy-five years? Grace almost blurted. Then she remembered she hadn't either just as long, longer. And it would never let her leave now.

"Hey," called a male voice from the apartment. "Entertainment time. Come on girls."

Bo leaped to her feet, turned several pirouettes and tiptoed to the door. The other women followed.

Turning in the doorway, Clara called to Grace who had remained seated. "Coming dear?"

"A moment."

Clara walked over to her side. "Anything wrong?"

"No. I just wanted to be alone for a little."

"We haven't seen you in

awhile, Grace."

"Are you still working in the library?"

"Yes. If you can call it that," laughed Clara. "I still bring my body down there."

"Maybe I'll drop by to see you."

"Fine. The others," Clara indicated the apartment with a wave of her hand, "the young ones, they don't know what it was like. They don't realize how lucky they are. Come on dear. Maybe you'll sing for us tonight? As I recall you had a wonderful voice."

"Not tonight, Clara. I'll just listen."

The two women entered the apartment.

"WILL YOU be him, Jon?"

"It's late, Grace. I—"

"Please, Jon."

"It's four in the morning. All right." Reluctantly he left the apartment to wait outside.

Grace pressed the button.

Summer. The house is unlighted. Grace, alone, lies in her bedroom. Against the window pane the summer storm settles into a light cooling rain. The doorbell rings . . .

"YOU KNOW? Of course you would," Grace said. She lay on the couch, hands folded on her stomach.

"The city tells me, Mrs. Clare," replied the doctor seated behind. "Just as it informed you it was time to consult a psychiatrist. Its

sensors pick up your every mood, as you know. Each week we all get a card reporting emotional and physical states. In addition to my own card, I get several reporting the state of my patients, as well as their actions. When did you first become aware of these suicidal tendencies, Mrs. Clare?"

"They aren't suicidal tendencies. Suicide suggest something abnormal. I want to die naturally, but the city won't let me so I've taken matters into my own hands."

"Mrs. Clare, you must admit self-preservation is a natural instinct. A desire to live is as normal as a desire for food and sex, and any wish for the contrary is a sign of sickness."

"Is it, doctor? People who fear death are unprepared for it. They haven't led full lives, they haven't come to any self-realization."

"Tell me, do you believe in an afterlife?"

"No. I believe in giving back to the earth what was borrowed from it. There is nothing but blackness in the earth."

"You would prefer an eternity of darkness to walking about, breathing the air, feeling the warmth?"

"The price is too high."

"Explain, Mrs. Clare."

"This city. When I first realized I wanted to die I had a strange vision. I saw the city as a black womb." Grace glanced backward at the psychiatrist. He mumbled "Go on," and scribbled a notation

in the pads resting against his crossed legs. "In my vision it appeared like a gigantic maternal creature, but blind and ugly."

"Continue."

"I realized then that it looks on all of us its children."

"Children?"

"Yes. It won't let us grow and develop. It robs us of the simplest decisions, feeds us fantasies through the machine. It keeps us young and children forever. Do you understand, doctor?"

He paused over the pad. "You hate the city?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure that isn't the reason you want—"

"No," interrupted Grace. "I hate it because it's a barrier. It stands in my way."

"To dying," finished the psychiatrist. "Do you attribute a consciousness to the city?"

"Yes."

"Do you think of it as a flesh and blood being?"

Grace laughed. "You don't understand. You think I'm insane too."

"Not insane, Mrs. Clare, but in need of help."

"The city isn't flesh and bone. The consciousness it has was programmed by living men. But it makes decisions. The prime directive given it was to decide what is best for the people living here. Each day the city decides more and more on its own how to better protect its children. Pretty soon the city will decide it best to

take over completely, close itself off from the prying hands of men and control everything."

"I see," said the doctor, rising. "And when will this occur?" He walked over to his desk.

"I don't know. A hundred years. Perhaps sooner. I said something the other night about the machine. It's applicable to the city as a whole."

"What was that, Mrs. Clare?" The doctor pressed several buttons on his desk. A small black box appeared.

"It's made us into puppets, and it will never cut the strings. It will never allow us the decency of death."

The psychiatrist took the needle gun from its case and approached Grace.

"What is it, doctor?"

"A sedative. Mild."

"What else?"

"A drug to paralyze your motor responses if you attempt suicide again. It's similar to the shot your husband gave you, but longer lasting." The chemical sprayed into her veins.

"Doctor, how long do you think before we all start breathing that stuff in the air?"

"Yours is a unique case, Mrs. Clare."

"My case is unique because I'm the only one who has come here to tell you about it. You don't know, doctor. Maybe there are others and when there are enough the city will make another decision: no suicides."

"Why do you come here?"
Smiled the psychiatrist.

"I thought I could make you understand."

"Don't I?"

"No."

"Why else, Mrs. Clare?"

"It helps me to arrange my thoughts. You ask all the right questions."

"Are you sure you aren't unconsciously seeking help?"

"Not that kind of help, doctor."

"Would you like to stop coming, Mrs. Clare?"

Grace laughed. "The city wouldn't allow it."

"We'll meet several more times. I think when we've got a full picture I'll recommend a complete personality restoration." He studied her face closely for the reaction.

Grace smiled. "It wouldn't work."

"Next week, Mrs. Clare. The same time." He brought her to the door. "Try not to think about your problems."

"Good-bye, doctor."

"Good-bye."

Grace rode the slow rollers rather than take a taxi. Lately she had come out often to walk the supply ramps, or ride the rollers. Always she studied the people she passed. There were a few whose faces mirrored her own anxiety, only a few, but the city was still young and the people in it just beginning to taste immortality.

A man on a rapid roller travel-

ing in the opposite direction passed close to her. Grace read the unmistakable lines around his eyes, and in that instant of recognition she had a vision of thousands wandering the streets five hundred years from now, walking wraiths imprisoned in a city that wouldn't let them die.

GRACE'S PLAN was simple, but she had to proceed slowly, cautiously. Her doctor and husband were watching. Most important she was under the close scrutiny of the city. Triumph registered in the increased rhythm of her heartbeats; anxiousness in the salt and moisture on her palms, in the rapid blinks of her eyes; altered emotional states mirrored in the rise and fall of her voice. All were measured, stored, analyzed by the city.

Grace's first step was the tranquilizers. Each day she took one of the depressants; it kept her body calm, emotionless, while she carefully worked out her plan.

"I THINK I'm suffering from guilt, doctor."

"Perhaps, Mrs. Clare."

"If I could program the machine for a punishment experience—" She paused, waited.

"Yes, go on."

"Well, maybe I could observe my reactions. It might give me an insight."

"Perhaps, Mrs. Clare. It's a healthy sign that you should want

to try."

THE BASIS of her plan was already formulated, but she needed a proper script, an historical figure to make it look unhurried, uncontrived. And more than that she wanted someone appropriate, someone who mirrored the wicked side of a city.

On Mondays and Fridays Grace did extensive research in the library. On these days, Clara, out of boredom, stood in as librarian, a position in name only since almost everything was hooked into city control. Through her, Grace got special access to the books locked in the cellar of the building.

"WHAT ARE you looking for specifically, Grace?"

"I'm helping Jon with some research. He does an occasional piece for the televiewer as you know."

"Well, I'll leave you to it, dear. You'll have to search after the tapes yourself. That room isn't part of the automatic system. Here's the key. Catalogue's to the left of the wire door."

Buried deep in the files Grace found the appropriate symbol.

"THE DOCTOR SAID it was a healthy sign, Jon."

"That's good. You know I'm always willing, Grace."

"Tonight, when you get home. I'll program it for then."

"Fine, Grace. I'll be back around six."

FOR AN HOUR she sat talking into the machine, filling in details, giving characteristics and descriptions.

It would close off another means of escape for others. The city would see its mistakes and rectify the error. But there had to be other ways, and with endless time to search the city's inhabitants would find them.

At six the machine dressed her in early 20th century garb, painted her face like a London tart.

The street was foggy. A gas lamp cast a feeble light on the pavement, and the only sound was Grace's footsteps.

At six five a black caped figure walked out of an alley and into the dim circle.

"Good time, mate?" Grace whispered provocatively.

The dark figure jiggled the black valise clutched in his left hand. Metallic instruments jangled inside—a hologram and sound effects.

The machine allows anything, within reason of course . . .

"A physician? Fancy," Grace said teasingly.

The dark figure stole a hand to the inside of his jacket. Grace sidled up to him.

"A quid for poor ol' Grace?" Quickly her hand darted under his into the concealed parts of his jacket.

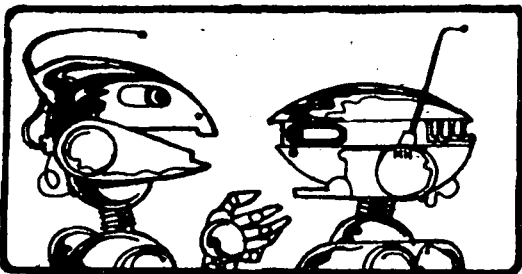
"Get away," snarled the man.

"What name, mate?" Her voice whined contritely.

(cont. on page 129)

**SUSAN
WOOD**

**the
Clubhouse**



THE FANZINES ARRIVE in torn and battered envelopes, bearing brightly-coloured stamps of wombats, gum trees and spiny anteaters. Their cancellation marks, which tend to say things like "The finest foods come from Australia," are at least two months old. Inside the magazines, entertaining people joke about each other, analyse sf, chatter about their lives, make outrageous remarks about anything sacred, and do everything that fans elsewhere do. Except, apparently, feud.

Australian fandom: thousands of miles away, alive on paper in my living room. "I must be talking to my friends" says the lettercolumn of Bruce Gillespie's *Science Fiction Commentary*. Australians do, indeed, turn their fanzines into conversations with their friends.

I'm writing this column in August, 1974. By the time you read it, it'll be 40° below zero in Regina, midsummer in Melbourne where a group of hot, harried Aussiefen will be realizing they only have six more months to prepare for their first worldcon. (This is not to imply that they aren't prepared already; the Australians seem to be an exceptionally organized, enthusiastic concommittee.) At the same time, you may be preparing for that

worldcon. Reading Australian fanzines is a good place to start.

By the time winter 1975 comes Down Under, I'll be visiting friends I knew well before I ever met them—the paradox of fandom. Friends like Leigh Edmonds, Australia's current Publishing Giant.

FANEW SLETTER (fortnightly; mimeo; 2pp., A9¢)

BOY'S OWN FANZINE 2 (edited with John Foyster; irregular, mimeo; 138 pp., for loc, contribution, trade, membership in the 1971 Australian national sf convention. December, 1973—though it actually appeared much later.)

RATAPLAN 14 (irregular, mimeo; 20 pp., 4/A\$1.60 or the usual. All the above from Leigh Edmonds, P.O. Box 74, Balaclava, Victoria 3138, Australia.)

Fanew sletter is just that: one 8"x13½" sheet of Australian fan news, which Leigh sends flying with awe-inspiring regularity into my mailbox. I can't really use information on Synecon '75, the Sydney sf convention; but I'm glad Leigh sends me the newsletter.

Fanew sletter provides a valuable service for Australians, telling who's published which fanzines, who's put-

ting on which conventions, who's visiting, getting married, or moving. Non-Aussies can read between the lines and discover what Aussiefandom is like. For example:

—Aussiefandom is small. From *Fanew sletter* 11, July 15, comes this report on the 13th National Australian Science Fiction Convention, OZCON '74:

"So far over 60 people have registered as members and this is quite a record for Australian conventions though it looks pretty puny alongside the 500+ that next year's WorldCon has but that's a little bit exceptional. However the committee of OZCON '74 hope to get a lot more members before the convention begins and they are even beginning to think that they might go beyond the 200 maximum that the convention facilities can cater for. So let's hope that there are 199 members in the end."

DISCON II membership was over 4,500. When was the last time a North American could attend a major convention of less than 200 people, with a chance to actually meet a few of them? 1948? Oh yes, room rates are \$12.50 single, \$16.50 single with bath or shower (Australia has European-style hotels?) \$24 double with bath or shower. It comes out higher when you realize those figures are in Australian dollars, worth, at the moment, \$1.50 us.

—Australian fandom is active. The list of clubs, conventions, publishing and social activities is staggering. Of course, at the centre is a hard core of some dozen persons whose names occur again and again. (Actually, its twin centres seem to be Mervyn Binn's Space Age Bookshop, newly-relocated home of the Melbourne sf club, and Degraives Tavern, home of Melbourne fandom.) There's a lot of

fannish enthusiasm Down Under. I hope they keep it after August, 1975.

—Australian fandom is friendly (in a slightly demented way.) From *Fanew sletter* 6 comes news of sf writer, fan, and Space Age stalwart Lee Harding:

"Lee Harding was taken ill last week with an illness known as Quinsy which apparently does strange and possibly painful things to one's throat. Reports state that the worst is past and Lee will soon return to his busy schedule of work at Space Age. A get well card and a magnificently gift wrapped can of chicken soup were sent to cheer him up from the people at Degraives last Wednesday."

The fanzines I have for review were all published at the height of the Down Under Fan Fund race, with four Australians competing for a trip to the 1974 worldcon in Washington, D.C. Bangsund nominated Edmonds; Edmonds nominated Bangsund; the rest of the country was either running, or nominating. The fans took part in a friendly, honest competition, actually discussing (notably in *Gegenschein* 16) each others' merits as representatives of Aussiefandom abroad, openly and without rancour. I was impressed. I've only encountered the equivant of the Australian fannish spirit once before—in the first volume of Harry Warner, Jr's *All Our Yesterdays*, describing the beginnings of North American fandom. Only—the Australians don't indulge in the feuds that scarred our fandom, even then.

—Australian fans seem to cluster around the major population centres, Sydney and Melbourne, though John Bangsund has Canberra all to himself. Physical proximity, the smallness of Australian fandom, and its isolation—that huge continent, empty except for nonfans and sheep, thousands of

miles from other fan centres—seems to encourage group solidarity.

—Australian fandom is, understandably, more British than North American. Fanzines contain British spellings and usages: “centre” instead of “center,” “flat” instead of “apartment” and so on. I must admit, though, I wasn’t prepared for a Synecon announcement that listed the membership cost as \$4 which “includes morning and afternoon teas.”

And a plaintive note in *Fanew sletter* 12 reveals that, because of inflation, Henry, owner of the Degraives Tavern, has taken fish and chips, “one of our favorite foods,” off the menu.

The British aura extends to the physical format of Aussiezines (perhaps because mimeo supplies are imported from England?) Paper is smaller than the North American norm: 8"x10" instead of 8½"x11". There's the same lack of interior artwork, probably for the same reasons; Aussies and Britons don't have access to the (relatively) inexpensive sources of electrostencils and offset printing available here. In *Gegenschein* 13, editor Eric Lindsay compares fanzine costs with Briton Pete Presford (*Madcap*) and American Pauline Palmer (*Wild Fennel*). Fandom is not “just a hobby” at those prices (and Eric also bemoans a paper shortage he estimates will last til 1990.)

Of the Australian faneds, Eric Lindsay and, especially, John Bangsund make good use of different typefaces and simple, effective layout. Bangsund, Edmonds, the Clarkes and Gillespie have also, at various times, used offset photos as covers and interior illos. I applaud that move; it's pleasant to see what those chaps Down Under look like (hairy, most of them). Other fanzines sometimes look a bit sloppy and typo-ridden. But

friendly. Speaking of typos, some aren't. Eric Lindsay, most notably, uses a spelling reform which makes “read” come out “red,” “any” become “eny” and so on.

I've quoted at length from *Fanew sletter* because I know few North Americans will have seen it. Leigh also publishes, with John Foyster, *Boy's Own Fanzine*. It's somewhat less regular; in fact, the last issue appeared in 1971.

BOF raises a perennial question: why publish? Leigh complains about fighting his duplicator, and “worrying about headings and page numbers, not exactly the most enjoyable aspects of fanzine publishing but facets of the business that have to be considered anyhow. Sometimes I wonder why we bother with fanzines.” Leigh and John bothered with *this* fanzine to provide transcripts of all the tapes of the 1971 Australian national convention (94 members—oh, for a small, intimate fandom!) plus a *very* strange tape from 1966 featuring Michael Moorcock and the New Wave/Old Wave battle (remember that?) and the script of “Joe Phaust,” a fan opera from the 1973 Melbourne Eastercon.

The tapes are rambling, sometimes hard to follow, as convention panels often are. Nevertheless, there's some thought-provoking material here: Jack Wodhams on writing to entertain, Dick Jenssen on his disenchantment with sf, Robin Johnson and audience on the Aussiecon bid, John Foyster interviewing Bruce Gillespie on the subject of sf criticism. There's also a Paul Stevens Show. The opportunity to experience one of these is one of my strongest reasons for travelling to Aussiecon.

The Australian accents don't come across on paper. Otherwise, reading BOF is almost like being in the same

room with the Aussies, sharing their jokes and the end-of-convention madness.

In an interview with Lee Harding, recorded at this convention, Leigh Edmonds confessed that he'd lost much of his interest in fanpublishing, and continued only to help publicize the bid, "through obligations, not because I want to." In the past two years, he seems to have regained his Sense of Wonder. His *Rataplan* is a small, frequent personalzine, fannish and enjoyable.

In issue 14, Joan Dick calls fanzines "a clearing house for wandering minds. And what wonderful places those minds find to wander through." Yes, indeed. Leigh's grandmother reminisces about Australian farm life at the turn of the century; I found her fascinating. John Alderson writes about his forty-secondth girlfriend, Alex Gas introduces the League of Intrepid Bath Soakers, and Jack Wodhams discusses nationalism and emphatically supports "Waltzing Matilda" as the new national anthem.

The spirit of the whole creation is summed up when Leigh answers Joan's musing on "what is a fanzine."

"Most fanzine publishers probably wouldn't mind printing material about science fiction and/or fantasy if they got any that they thought was good enough to print but unfortunately, in Australia at least, Bruce Gillespie soaks all that up and we are left with having to print material about any old thing that comes to hand. Not that we complain too much really, John Alderson in his breaking down old heap of a car, 'wop opera' or entertaining yourself by walking home from church seem to be generally far more interesting than the latest Bob Silverberg book."

ARK 2 (Suep and Ronl Clarke, 2/159 Herring Rd., North Ryde, NSW 2113, Australia; irregular, mimeo; 40pp., 75¢, 3/A\$2 or the usual. Autumn (March) 1974)

Ah yes. March is autumn, Down Under. It was a bit jarring, though, to receive Autumn, 1974 issues of *Ark* and Bangsund's *Philosophical Gas* in the spring of 1974. The Clarkes make friendly slurs about the wintry weather we can expect next August in the Frozen South around Melbourne. I'm sure they'll keep me too well entertained to notice.

The Clarkes, having worked hard to buy some land, are now putting their efforts into fanpublishing. Sue, contributing the editorial for the second issue of their fanzine, leads off with "The Song of Australia." The lyrics are about as banal as any other patriotic song (sorry, Sue, but I like the idea of "Waltzing Matilda," myself). Watching another country's nationalism develop is interesting, though.

In the rest of the issue, John Alderson contributes an article about magpies. Max Taylor produces some short book reviews. "Short book reviews, ho hum," I thought, flipping the pages—only to realize he's discussing, not outdated British sf reprints, but a guide to pottery-making, an Australian novel, a *Canadian* novel. . . eclectic, those Aussies. Del and Dennis Stocks' two-part article on Gordie Dickson's Dorsai series, unfortunately, relies too heavily on rambling plot summaries; and Val Molesworth's Australian fanhistory, while a worthy effort, is primarily of local interest. But Bertram Chandler's "Grimesish Grumberlings" on airships (a slightly different version appears in *Philosophical Gas* 27) confirms my desire to meet him. Captain Chandler

writes about any topic with knowledge, interest, and, especially, competence. He seems to be the sort of person who's fascinated by the way things work, be they blimps or sentences.

With Ark came *The Wedding*, an account, with photos, of Ron and Sue's nuptials. It appears to have been typed, in part at least, on their wedding night (your reviewer said, dubiously). The Happy Couple sat in their motel room with a bottle of white wine ("which we've decided tastes revolting"), and a big box of Kentucky fried chicken, watching Vincent Price in "The Haunted House." Fascinating people, these Aussiefans!

GEGENSCHEIN 13, 14, 15, 16 (Eric Lindsay, 6 Hillcrest Ave., Faulconbridge NSW 2776, Australia; irregular, mimeo; 18 to 20pp., 4/A\$1, 3/US\$1, 6/£. March through May, 1974.)

The Clarkes' nearest fannish neighbour is Eric Lindsay. His *Gegenschein* is probably the most "international" of the current Australian fanzines, featuring contributors, letterhacks and influences from Britain and North America. Issue 14 is "dedicated to Richard E. Geis, who first suggested that other editors use microelite type." The resemblance goes beyond the eyestraining typeface, since Eric adopts *The Alien Critic's* format of letters, short reviews, articles and personal comments all strung together in double columns. Issue 15 is dedicated to Ed Connor, and is published in the *Moebius Trip* pocket book format; again, it mixes short reviews and letters. Issue 16 features fine artwork—Steve Fabian cover, Canfield and McLeod interiors—and graphic experiments to enhance fine contents both serious and fannish, the

whole impeccably mimeod on blue paper. Influenced by *Energumen*, Eric?

Gegenschein is a solid, quality genre, concentrating on sf. In "The Fannish Inquisition" in issue 16, Eric criticizes the more personal trend evident in the last issues of Bruce Gillespie's *Science Fiction Commentary*:

"It was nice to see that Bruce was not a stencil typing robot, but his heart was very much on his sleeve in some issues. People live in societies by wearing masks; some can set aside the mask and reveal parts of themselves without letting the rest of the society interact with them—Dick Geis is an example. Others set aside the mask in a more subtle manner, so that no one is shocked by their face—John Bangsund manages this. However most of us cannot, and it is probably folly to try, no matter how tempting."

Eric puts down his own mask only briefly, when he says that:

"I both like and dislike my own fanzine more than any other in Australia. I suppose I like it for the usual things: the egoboo, as a status symbol within fandom, as a means of expressing myself unhampered by any consideration except my own ability, as a creation that is uniquely my own. Producing a fanzine is the antitheses of mundane life; rather than being a cooperative act it is an individual one, an expression of where I stand.

"I dislike it because I do not reach the goals that I set myself."

Eric reveals his own personality through his responses to letters, his choice of material, and his attempts to reach his ideal of a fanzine.

Gegenschein 16, incidentally, also tells a lot about high book prices in Australia. I'm surprised there are any sf fans at all!

(cont. on page 129)

Cliometrics, or the study of history by computer, is a brand new application of computer technology, and George Zebrowski, who makes his first appearance here with this story, has written a new kind of "hard science fiction" around cliometrics. Nebula nominee Jack Dann says of this story, "For my money, this kind of sf tale is a harbinger. Most 'hard' sf uses the hardware and technology which is a by-product of pure science; this story extrapolates on one facet of the philosophy of science; it uses the sf format to give flesh to otherwise inaccessible ideas . . ."

THE CLIOMETRICON

GEORGE ZEBROWSKI

Illustrated by RICHARD OLSEN

This universe is constantly splitting into a stupendous number of branches, all resulting from the measurementlike interactions between its myriad components. Moreover, every quantum transition taking place on every star, in every galaxy, in every remote corner of the universe is splitting our local world on earth into myriads of copies of itself.

—Bryce S. DeWitt, "Quantum Mechanics and Reality" *Physics Today*, Sept. 1970

THE CLIOMETRICON visualizes alternate histories.

A standard history machine enables us to see history in terms of cause and affect. The cliometricon shows lines of might-have-beens as causal probabilities. Both types of apparatus are inaccurate to the

degree that each leaves out the experience-of-events. This phenomena must be supplied by the trained imaginations of licensed historical observers.

Slowly, subtly, the cliometricon draws the basic quantum transitional processes of time into itself, calculating probabilities (a more general form of causality) more like a banker than a gambler; and we see the stuff of time take 100^{100+N} differing directions in the guise of matter and living flesh.

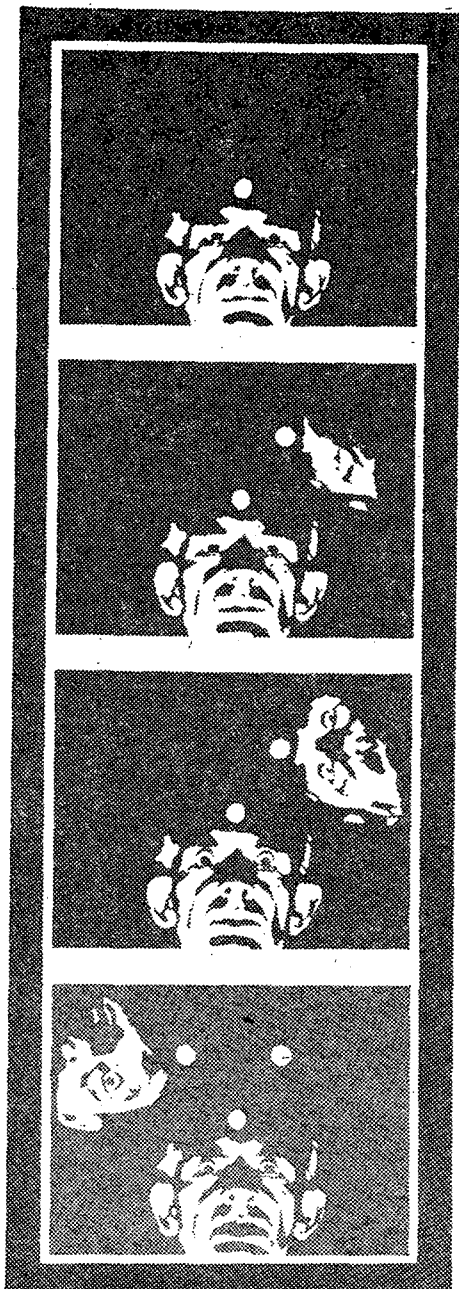
It teaches the class of historians who have been previously restricted to standard home-line history machines a sense of expanded contingency and complex determination. Clio, the muse of history, is wooed with measure and analysis far beyond the linear perceptions of normal observers. Alternate world-lines, we learn,

are not mere probabilities in a bloodless realm, but realities in the finer structures of reality.

I AM WATCHING General Eisenhower as he walks along the white cliffs of Dover. It is raining and his face is hidden in the shadow under his cap. His eyes move his head to peer across the channel at the dark continent of Europa which seems now forever lost to the will of the failed invasion . . .

In his mind rise up fearful bloody shadows of men retreating, thrown dying into the sea by Rommel's defenses; whole divisions destroyed, burned and blinded by the relatively mild effects of tactical nuclear artillery. Lost, an entire world of towns and villages and cities, bordered in the east by a giant who will not rise again after being blackened into ash by the full scale strategic fury of Hitler's thermonuclear whirlwinds. The giant who had been counted on to bleed the most is dead.

I PUSH the CLEAR tab for the If-Continuum System Interlock. Before me, in blue light, appears a figure like myself sitting before a machine with his back to me. On his screen appears another figure; and on his still another; and another, into the vanishing point. System Interlock mode functions check the world lines for integrity. A breakage would show itself as a chaos frame filled with furious noise and random images.



Reality is a matrix of relatively fixed world-lines. If-points exist as potentials in each line. If-points extend themselves from a potentially contingent moment, though not from all such moments, and also become relatively fixed world-lines. It is the overlay of an infinite number of if-lines which produces the perceived experience of contingency, or choice, in an observer. The psychological reality of observers integrates if-lines.

HISTORIANS DEBATE whether world-lines are diverging in absolute or relative space, or if they are converging to form an integrated statistically determined world-line. Breakages might be indications of unsuccessful integration processes brought about by unusually fluid thought processes of observers in different lines. As long ago as the 1970's Eugene Wigner had advocated a gross nonlinear departure from Schrödinger's normal equations, indicating what must happen when conscious observers are taken into account. Wigner even proposed that a search be conducted for possible effects of consciousness on matter. Today only a comprehensive System Interlock meeting of scholars might resolve this problem, and perhaps even help in the creation of an integrated line. But this does not seem likely, as not all lines have developed cliometric technology . . .

Cliometrics is a tool of empiri-

cal research and record keeping—a significant improvement over the old impressionistic, non-dimensional, often uni-valent written texts. Written texts were always observer distortions, utterances rife with psychological reference errors; reference was made as much to the observer as to the vague historical *object*. The result was a directional product of the two, as well as an historical object of its own time. Experience and subjectivity (both important facts about observers) were conveyed only indirectly. The imaginative memory of so-called novelists was the closest thing to the direct scrutiny of today's licensed temporal observers.

Cliometric technology recreates with precision directly from quantum physical sources, catching through physical implication the play of permutations on the experienced level . . .

THERE IS A WIND at Thermopylae.

The Spartan defensive force has not arrived. The moment of might-have-been has passed. The initial *necessary* conditions were present, but the *sufficient* circumstances are absent.

The first Persian scouts are coming through the pass, shielding their faces against the wind . .

Five thousand Spartans will not lie dead on the rocky ground. Many will never see battle, siring hundreds of children instead. Greece will not be stirred by the

death of Leonidas. He will die at the hands of a jealous husband.

As I watch, the efficient cause of all these things comes into view—furies casting shadows onto the stone strewn landscape.

There are wings over Thermopylae, white wings in a sun-windy afternoon. War gliders from Athens. Created by Themistocles' physicists.

As the Persians stream into the pass from their ships on the shore, the Greeks glide in low and drop fireballs on the advancing horde. And when finally Apollo's naphta runs dry, the gliders turn wings and disappear.

A second squadron appears, riding into the updrafts from the pass, rocking high above the reach of Persian arrows and lances

EISENHOWER PAUSES at the chalk cliff's edge. He is a dark solid three dimensional shadow in the light, a mere uniform stuffed with unseen flesh.

The screen lights up with an atomic flash, and I know that his flesh is disintegrating, his skeleton melting. The fortress of England is crumbling. Shakespeare's original folios are ash upon the withering green. I turn down the light streaming from the screen.

Somewhere above, I imagine clearly, the pilotless bomber makes a slow turn and heads back toward the Luftwaffe field in France, where they already know what the bright western dawn

means.

Rudolph Hess gets up from the remote control screen. An aide takes over while he goes to the bunker slits to peer out. The returning bomber is a dark insect against the bright orange cumulous of megadeath.

EISENHOWER TUMBLES off the cliff, his torso pierced clean-through by a bullet fired leisurely from the deck of the submarine which only a moment ago surfaced offshore and is already beginning to dive.

In the periscope, Eisenhower's falling body looks for just a moment like a black spider floating down on a piece of web. The sea swallows his corpse as his aides look on. From a distance their faces are only patches of white.

The spitfire aircraft will be too late to sink the sub.

WE ARE THE HEIRS of the old Cliometricians, who in the twentieth century first married the muse of history to quantification. No one mind could see meaning in masses of data so huge that light years of distance would be required to simply lay all the bits end to end.

But still the data was finite. It could be enumerated, and even interpreted with the help of our children, the computer minds.

Our task became harder, nevertheless.

The quantum of historical action is multifarious.

Probabilities are infinite. The store of alternatives is eternal, inexhaustible. Only this fact and endless individual events are absolute.

The practice of our profession is safely incomplete. The whole is divinely indefinable and mysterious.

EISENHOWER SWIMS to shore. Blood streams from his shoulder and mingles with the sea foam as he struggles onto a rock, where he manages to contain the flow until a boat arrives.

He watches as the submarine is sunk by spitfires.

THE CLIOMETRICON is an endlessly growing library of visual records (the visual form grew out of the entertainingly contemplative motion picture arts of the twentieth century). Parastatics, the technology of sub-molar engineering, led to the storage of infinite amounts of information within the infinitesimal folds of space-time below the Fermi threshold. Each record is filed with a library of assessments and statistical evaluations. Every observer bias is included and taken into account by the next observer. Naturally, the home-line receives special attention in terms of recorded bulk.

IN THAT MOMENT when he contemplates his plans for the conduct of the war, Eisenhower is joined to the ultimate enigma of time's flow—the forward direction

toward a still formless future.

On the screen it appears as a shapeless chaos of the thing-in-itself, the substratum of all that is large and small, the malleable reality of infinite variation. This is, of course, only a visualization, unlike the real-time recovery of overlaid events, which are also considerably more regular.

In Eisenhower's mind it becomes a determination of decision, qualified by the probabilities of physical control during execution: he sees an invasion in which the landing is never made; all ships are sunk or turned back long before the landing barges can be launched; the army comes ashore but is driven back into the sea by an overwhelming panzer force; the allies sweep across Europe, only to be swept back by the Russian army whose commanders still remember Western intervention in their post revolutionary civil war (Dunkirk repeats itself on a larger scale); the allies use nuclear weapons to level Germany, and later all of western Russia . . .

Between all these events, I can see an infinity of trivial variations and minor crises; while alongside these events lie radical alternatives and their variations.

The continuum of probabilities is infinitely crowded.

WORLD LINES growing out of the past thrust insistently into a shapeless future. There is rest in the visualized presence of the

formless chaos on the screen. Here I cannot retreat to a point where orderly patterns become visible—the point at which waves seem to be well concentrated around their average length and the quantum of action is negligible, the point in Schrödinger's equations where the shortness of wave lengths permits the classical world of Newton to come into being. Here lies the ultimate irrational. Here the agony of events has no meaning, except that I visualize them.

Individuals perish, but the eyes of intelligence endure, receiving the information which makes a universe exist, ending the chain of infinite regression and possibility of the indeterminate. Without eyes the thing-in-itself is cold and lightless—despite its energy—and alone. The waves of confusion and possibility do not coalesce into solid matter; touch and sight cannot be born.

The consciousness of observers creates time and history. Objectivity is relative, but no less real.

EISENHOWER SHIVERS at Dover. Turning away from the sea, he walks up the path to his jeep. He cannot be sure of his world. He can plan, decide and carry out while hovering at the abyss of uncertainty, an edge more fearful than any cliff. In the firmament of time, his character will play all possible roles, an endless fresco painted by the muses of biology and physics. Armies will struggle,

are struggling, as I watch him drive away . . .

I push the *minor* stytem interlock and watch myself watching him drive away, toward where the road runs close to the edge over the gentle breakers below . . .

The road gives way. I cannot see the effect of Eisenhower's trivial death on my face, unless I turn around and watch my copy do the same in the mirror which I have set up illegally behind myself. I turn around, knowing that I am violating the personal peeping prohibitions. But this is the first time, and perhaps the corps of watchers will not notice.

I want to feel what my alternates feel, at least one. I want to feel his face in mine. I want to know at least one other of the army of observers which fills up the abyss within me. After all, they are all within me, and I live in them. I will risk my tenure and the practice of history-as-usual for this.

A face appears—my own, but much older.

"What do you want? A prolonged link is a violation."

"I want to talk to you."

"There is no time!"

I panic and push the button for a resumption of normal flow.

THE UNIVERSE MOVES with sleight-of-hand, the unknown becoming known, time unfolding, ignorance leading to discovery and knowledge. I feel the anguish of space-time in a night land chilled

by endless icy stars. Time and I unwind from darkness like a glittering snake. Time is the dark pulsing body of the serpent, and I the glitter. Psycho-physical parallelism is the central fact of history

a kind of ghostly world whose symbols, such as the wave function, represent potentiality rather than reality." If-lines are not real.

Yet . . .

. . . LEONIDAS *thinks* as he lies dying, and his thoughts press into me. Time passes, he whispers, and I feel vague changes inside, wondering what is this *effort* of time passing, this changing which seems not to change, this journeying near the shore with no goal in sight? Familiarity has dulled the questing in me, hiding enigmas in the robes of everyday, preventing unmapped thoughts. Does time pass where there are no heartbeats? If I could only hold myself perfectly still, stay the mortal blood passing from me into the earth, then I would hear time pass near while never touching me. It would continue to write in the ephemeris of the ephemeral, changing the shape and shadow of all living things, excepting me . .

OPPENHEIMER, TELLER and Eisenhower visit the ruins of Moscow, now levelled by strategic nuclear weapons of only low yield, while a world away Speer seeks to recruit Einstein and Bohr for work in the victorious Reich. Teller and Oppenheimer have committed suicide . . .

LEONIDAS LIES DYING in the pass at Thermopylae.

Possibilities are slowly fading from his face, along with the late afternoon sunlight. The soldiers around him look like hard-shelled beetles in their armor. His face is my face, his thoughts my own as death steals over him . . .

THERE ARE SOME who deny the possibility of deducing macro-events from micro-quantum events. The heresy states that what we see on the screens of the cliometricon are imaginative-extrapolations based on the wealth of facts and assumptions inherited from the past. Bryce S. DeWitt, a professor of the twentieth century, had recorded that "The quantum realm must be viewed as

AN ATOMIC FLASH, followed by a zenomorphic mushroom.

Oppenheimer says, "I am become death, the shatterer of worlds."

Endless worlds, or the ghosts of chance?

This heresy has the power to consume me.

—GEORGE ZEBROWSKI

ON SALE IN JULY AMAZING April 29th

The beginning of JACK VANCE'S NEW NOVEL—MARUNE ALASTOR: 933 and many new stories and features.

Warning: this is probably the most apparently—but only apparently—gratuitously violent story we have ever published. If you prefer stories about butterflies or pink bunny-rabbits, I suggest you skip this one . . .

ALL ALONE AND FEELING BLUE

MICHAEL GERARD

“FUCKING BASTARD! I’ve been waiting fifteen minutes for your goddamn train!” Wilson shouted as he pushed the shotgun into the faretaker’s cage. “Motherfucker!” he pulled the triggers, giving the agent a simultaneous left and right. The agent’s head exploded off of his shoulders, leaving an official transit map behind him unreadable.

The rush hour crowd gathered around the subway turnstiles made no move to stop him as he kicked and clawed his way to the stairs.

“You fools, assholes! The fucking train, you can have it! It’s unreliable. Taxis forever! Fuck the tip . . .”

He bounded up the stairs and out onto the crowded sidewalks of downtown Chicago. He was at State and Madison, the center of the city. People all around him, vehicles curb to curb in the streets, all seemed frozen in the timeless epoch of going home. Wilson ran, through and over the crowds, kicking people, stepping

on them, crossing streets by the rooftops of bumper-to-bumper cars.

Spewing an exiting patron headlong onto the pavement outside, he dashed through the revolving door of a large department store. After leaping and jumping from counter to counter he finally reached the Sports Department, where he hurdled the *Guns* counter and pinned the salesman to the floor, his right foot on the man’s neck.

“Motherfucking sumbitch, I want your guns!” he screamed at the man as he tore a high powered rifle from the wall case. Deftly turning without removing his foot from the man’s neck, he smashed the butt of the rifle into the glass counter-top. He stirred the butt around the sides of the counter, removing all the shards of glass which might cut him, then reached in for the ammunition. Chambering one shell, Wilson shoved the muzzle of the gun into the salesman’s left eyeball and pulled the trigger.

"That was for *you*, asshole!" he screamed.

He chambered five more rounds and walked down to the next counter, *Fishing*, slipping and nearly falling as he passed the gun salesman's head. He gave the fishing salesman a phoney smile, then slammed the butt of the rifle into the man's front teeth, which gave way smartly.

"Teach you . . . teach all of you. I want a goddam creel, dummy," he said as he pulled one from the mannequin's shoulder. "To carry my ammo in . . ."

He returned to the *Guns* counter and began stuffing cartridges into the fishing creel. Behind the counter once more, he slipped a .357 Magnum into his belt. Then he shouldered the bulging ammunition creel and left the store, once again knocking someone to the floor as he jammed swiftly through a revolving door.

A taxicab stood at the curb, its driver bent over a copy of *The Daily Racing Form* on his lap. Wilson opened the curbside front door and shoved the Magnum hard into the driver's right ear.

"Not one cent," he said as he pulled the trigger. "No tip for you, motherfucker."

He reached across the body and opened the door. The dead man fell out, landing on his head, his feet still in the cab. Carefully Wilson reached out and retrieved *The Daily Racing Form*. He wiped the seat with it and threw it back out as he slid behind the

wheel. He started the cab and pulled away, the driver bumping along beside the moving vehicle.

"Get out, you asshole!" he screamed as he kicked at the man's left foot, which was caught beneath the seat. "It's my cab now. Get out, I have to close my door!" With a final vicious kick the man's foot came free and the door closed.

"Too slow, too goddamed slow," Wilson muttered. He put his hand on the horn ring and, holding it there, he took to the sidewalks. He was doing thirty now, but it was a bumpy ride. A newsstand loomed ahead. Wilson turned the wheel to the right to negotiate the corner and slid broadside into the vendor's metal shack, pushing it into the street behind it. As the stand went over the curb it unfolded like a cardboard box. The cab slid up and then down over the edge, through the turn, trailing newspapers in its wake.

Wilson continued driving, heading in general toward Michigan Avenue. He had come within a block of that street when he was stopped by a little old lady crossing an intersection.

"You fucking bitch! You goddam good-for-nothing, worn-out, old douche bag!" he screamed at the lifeless and mangled form which was jammed up into the left front wheel well, somewhat impeding steering and finishing the cab as a form of transportation. Grabbing up the creel and

the rifle, he began walking.

Turning the corner onto Michigan, he looked south towards the Conrad Hilton Hotel. Feeling that a nap in the comfort of a luxury hotel was in order, he stepped off down the street. Minutes later he entered the hotel lobby.

"I want a room," he said quietly to the clerk behind the desk. When there was no immediate response, he vaulted over the polished counter, screaming, "I wanna room, *now!*"

He pulled the inkwell next to the register off the desk and rammed it into the clerk's mouth. And kept it going by using first the butt, then the muzzle, of the rifle to route the three ounce bottle down the clerk's esophagus. Reaching up, he picked a key from one of the boxes for the top floor.

"No fucking courtesy these days . . . teach him, though," he muttered as he crossed the lobby to the bank of elevators. Eschewing the crowded ones which stood with doors open in the act of discharging or picking up passengers, Wilson stationed himself before a closed door and punched the button. Shortly he heard a sighing sound from the doors in front of him, and then they opened, revealing an empty elevator. Empty except for a rather plainfaced young woman who sat before a console with buttons denoting the various floors of the hotel.

"You hotel people will do anything to get the customer's money, won't you? Even put an elevator girl in an automatic elevator," he said. Looking down at his key he reached quickly to the top of the console and punched his floor. "'S alright, I got it," he said. The girl looked bored.

The doors slid shut, and he looked down at the girl. She was seated in one of those fold down chairs and leaning rather languidly against the wall of the elevator. He bent down and stared directly into her eyes, just inches away.

"Whassamatter? Cat got your tongue?" The girl just stared right back at him, a rather empty look in her eyes. He stood up slowly. Then he viciously backhanded her across the face, knocking her off the seat and onto the floor, shouting, "Cat got your fucking tongue?"

As she fell he reached swiftly up her dress dress as far as he could, and grabbing hard, pulled her panty hose down to her knees.

"Cat got your motherfucking tongue, bitch?" he queried again, and stomped his foot down hard on her face. He bent down and slammed his fist into her stomach just above her skirt, then he slid his hand under the waistband of her skirt and tore the garment from her limp body.

"I'll teach you, bitch, you're just like all the others, but I'll

teach you," he said as he slashed his hand down the front of her blouse, ripping the buttons off and exposing her bra-covered chest. "Oh, you got some fine tits, baby, just a fine body all around. But it's a paper sack for your face, sweets."

The doors slid open behind him and grabbing the girl by her hair, he pulled her into the hallway. Moving off to the right with his burden dragging behind him and leaving heelmarks in the plush carpet, he passed two doors before he realized he was headed in the wrong direction. Reversing his course, he finally came to the room number that corresponded to the key he had taken from the desk. He unlocked the door, and pulling the girl behind him, entered the suite. When he reached the center of the room he released the girl's hair. Her head hit the rug with a muffled sound.

He returned to the door, shedding the rifle and ammo-laden creel as he walked, and double-locked it. Turning to face the still form on the floor, he took the Magnum from his belt and threw it across the room onto the bed. His pants came off next, and his shorts followed. He advanced upon the girl, fondling himself as he walked, clad only in shirt, shoes, and socks.

"Bitch," he said, as he tore her panty hose completely off. He stood above her for a moment, then inserted his foot between her heels and kicked first one leg,

then the other, out to the side. He knelt in the intervening space and reached forward and tried to rip the girl's bra off. He succeeded only in lifting her torso from the floor and eventually had to reach around behind her back and unfasten the undergarment. With the bra gone he fell upon her, suckling at her breasts, intruding first his fingers, then his organ into her. She remained motionless beneath him.

She was dry, and he found the going tough. Soon, out of breath, unspent, he stopped. He looked down at her, then, frustrated he began to slap her. Back and forth, his arm swung in an arc above her head. Finally, exhausted, he rolled away from her limp form.

"Wake up . . . I want you to wake up," he said in a small voice. "I want you . . . want you to . . . participate. Be *with* me . . . Please . . . please . . ." His breath came in short gasps, then suddenly he screamed, "God-damit, *wake up!*"

He shook her body violently, but without result. He stood up, then reached down and took hold with both hands of her left ankle. She was not heavy, and as he slowly started to turn in a circle, her body became airborne. He spun around, like an Olympic hammer-thrower, then, crying out, "Bitch!" he released her. She spun across the room towards the window. Her head and shoulders plowed into the wall and frame next to the window, but the lower

part of her body spun on through the window, leaving him alone in the room.

He moved to the bed and collapsed onto the flowered spread which covered it. The wind came in through the broken window, whipping the drapes around violently. After a bit, Wilson sat up and stared disconsolately at the flailing drapes.

"Can't stay in a room with a broken window, can I?" he said to himself. "'S got no class." He got up and dressed.

Gathering up the ammunition and rifle and stuffing the pistol into his belt again, he moved to the door. He stepped cautiously out into the hallway, looking to the left and right as he did so. Creeping down the hall toward a branching corridor, he peeked around the corner made by the intersection of the two hallways. There he saw a gurney with rags and bottles on it and the accompanying cleaning woman.

"Pass key," he whispered to himself.

Quietly he laid the creel on the carpet, then stepped around the corner and snapped off two quick shots at the woman. One of them caught her in her rather ample breast, which exploded like a balloon filled with catsup. Wilson rushed up and pumped two more bullets into the prone figure, permanently staining the hallway carpet in the process. He ripped a key ring from a chain attached to her belt, and turned back down

the corridor to retrieve his creel. As he walked away from the mess, he turned and called back, "Clean that up, momma!"

Now he moved to the side of the building that fronted on Michigan Avenue, and consequently, the lake itself. He wanted to be able to look out across the rich brown expanse of sunburnt grass in Grant Park and see the contrasting whitecaps on the lake as they rolled in on the breakwater. He stopped in front of a door that he figured was roughly in the center of the long corridor.

As silently as he could he began trying keys in the lock. The second one worked and, rifle in hand, he eased the door open and stepped into the room.

On the bed before him a man lay atop a spread-eagled woman, both of them naked. Silently he moved to the foot of the bed and set the creel down. Taking a firm grip on both the stock and the barrel of the gun, Wilson leaned forward and ploughed the muzzle of the weapon into the man's anus, simultaneously pushing down on the butt end of the gun so that the slug tore straight up the man's body and exited at the top of his head. The body slid to one side, revealing the woman beneath. Her glazed eyes seemed to stare into the depths of Wilson's soul as he released his grip on the rifle, which remained in its forced position.

"You wouldn't have fucked me

like that, bitch!" Wilson cried as he pulled the Magnum from his belt and removed the glaze from one of the woman's eyes, along with much of the back of her head, with one well-placed shot.

Pulling the man's body from the bed, he let it drop to the floor where it lay like some grotesque animal, the still impacted rifle giving the appearance of a third leg. Then Wilson slid onto the bed himself and, exhausted from the day's activities, fell asleep with his head on the breast of the dead woman.

He awoke in the dark, to the sound of a gigantic bumblebee. Stumbling to the window he looked out upon a clear, moonlit night. In the sky above the shadows of huge airplanes swept in from across the lake. Wave upon wave passed over his head in the minute or so that he watched before turning back to the bed. He was lulled back to sleep by the sound which only moments before had awakened him.

Awakened in the morning by the bright sun streaming in through the windows, Wilson sat up in bed and immediately reloaded the Magnum. Then he walked out of the room and back

to the same elevator he had come up on the day before. He touched the call button and the doors immediately slid open. He entered the empty cubicle and punched the button for the lobby. When the doors opened he stepped out into the same lobby he had been through the day before. He walked over to the desk, passing crowded elevators which stood with doors open in the act of discharging or picking up passengers.

"I'm checking out," he said to the clerk, a man with an extremely large and unusually shaped Adam's apple. Wilson threw the keys down on the floor next to the man. Then, pistol in hand, he turned and strode out onto Michigan Avenue.

He shot at the first living human he saw.

The second living human he saw shot him first, and Wilson died on Michigan Avenue, in front of the Conrad Hilton Hotel.

The Russian corporal who killed him was reprimanded for eliminating a valuable scientific curiosity, one of the handful of Americans who had, for some unknown reason, survived the One Hour War.

—MICHAEL GERARD

ON SALE IN JUNE FANTASTIC March 27th

MICHAEL MOORCOCK'S—COUNT BRASS, ROBERT E. HOWARD & LIN CARTER'S—THE TOWER OF TIME, ROBERT F. YOUNG'S—TECHMECH, and other new stories and features.

Editorial (cont. from page 4)

"stf," remained in the fans' lexicon at least until the beginning of the sixties (often paired with "fsy" for fantasy).

In the late fifties long-time stfan Forrest J Ackerman created a new neologism for science fiction: "sci-fi." It was a time when "high fidelity" had been shortened to "hi-fi" by the makers of lo-fi record-playing equipment, and the phrase, "hi-fi", was to be found everywhere in our culture. To Ackerman the impulse to coin "sci-fi" must have been irresistible—but many of us who have otherwise only the kindest thoughts for the man continue to curse the day when he brought forth his new creation and "sci-fi" was born.

Harlan Ellison speaks eloquently for us on this topic. In a letter to the rock paper *Zoo World* he says, "...the use of that vomitous neologism 'sci-fi.' Among people in the sf world, the phrase is bullshit journalese on the same emotional and intellectual par with nigger, broad, draft-dodger or kike. We hate it, and when *any* sf reader sees it in a headline, slug-line or body-copy, he knows the chances of what he's about to read being uninformed, superficial, over-familiar and dilettante rise geometrically. It is a *dumb* phrase, and you should deepsix it forever at the risk of being called idiots."

Or, to put it in other words, when *Newsweek* refers to "sci-fi," you know it will be in conjunction with a put-down of our field. These are not the connotations Forry intended for the phrase, I'm sure, but not only are they the connotations we must contend with, they seem to me to grow inescapably out of the roots of the origin of "sci-fi": a schlock sell-phrase.

It is probably coincidence that "sci-fi" was coined at a time when "scientification" was in the process of

dying, forgotten and in disuse. But it is not coincidence which has led to the revival of the term "stf" on my part. When typed, "stf" has only one more character than "sf," and the same number of characters as "s-f" (a less often used alternate). When pronounced aloud, "stf" (or "steff") is one syllable; "sf" (pronounced "ess-eff") has two. Thus the term has ease of usage working in its favor.

More to the point, I think it is time we returned with pride to an awareness of our origins, our "roots," if you will. Thus, in preparation for our Fiftieth Anniversary I am reviving a time-honored word: "scientification" and its abbreviation "stf."

Will you join me?

THE ROLE OF MAN: Dan Barnett, of Paradise, California (an ironically named place to live, in light of the subject matter which follows) writes the following letter:

Thank you for this opportunity to make a few comments. I've tended to think of science fiction as being on some "cutting edge": whether in literary experimentation, or idea extrapolation, or in the understanding of a human being as he faces his own future. Technology is shaping and molding us and perhaps only science fiction can really show what kind of people we are becoming. But sf writers are also being affected by this shaping and molding. Rather than seeking new alternatives to the dilemmas of this age, it seems to me more and more they are reflecting the basic assumptions of today's world as they write of other worlds. It is as if sf writers have capitulated to the thought of today and are merely changing the scenery, not the thought, as they write of tomorrow.

Certainly it is foolish to put all of science fiction in one bag; yet I wonder if there aren't certain identifiable trends developing in the areas I've indicated. I'd like to present here a few quotations and then get down to specifics in discussing them.

"And Stack came back to Snake, who had served his function and protected Stack until Stack had learned that he was more powerful than the God he'd worshipped all through the history of men. He came back to Snake and their hands touched and the bond of friendship was sealed at last, at the end."—Harlan Ellison in his story "The Deathbird," 1973

"Yet the human race is the result of an amoeba trying to reproduce itself exactly. Biological organisms do change. And so do societies."—Ben Bova, from an editorial in *Analog*, August 1974, p. 11.

"Life is not sacred. Life is a natural condition on this planet—life is an environment. We, as human beings, are unique among the life-forms we know, but that does not give us the right to deify ourselves or our life processes."—Ted White, in a reply to a reader letter, *AMAZING*, August 1974, p. 73.

"Should we abandon the fruitless pasttime of perfecting mankind and instead simply accept humanity for what it is? . . . We exist as we exist, do as we do (time and time again), for a reason. We are built this way—for war, strife, greed—why? We use reason to further emotional ends. . . . I keep coming back to the thought that we are as we are because we win this way as a species. We purify and advance ourselves

as a species with wars and aggressions."—Dick Geis, in an article in *If*, June 1974, pp. 107-108.

"Nexialism is the science of joining in an orderly fashion the knowledge of one field of learning with that of other fields. It provides techniques for speeding up the processes of absorbing knowledge and of using effectively what has been learned. . . . The problems which Nexialism confronts are whole problems. . . . And, even though [man] sometimes uses words which indicate his awareness of that wholeness of nature, he continues to behave as if the one, changing universe has many separately functioning parts."—A. E. van Vogt, from *Voyage of the Space Beagle*.

"If God is One, what is bad?"—Charles Manson in *Rolling Stone Magazine*, June 25, 1970.

Nietzsche "assumes that Christianity, as a product of the resentment of the botched and the weak, has put in ban all that is beautiful, strong, proud, and powerful. . . and that, in consequence, all forces which tend to promote or elevate life have been seriously undermined. Now, however, a new table of valuations must be placed over mankind—namely, that of the strong, mighty, and magnificent man, overflowing with life and elevated to his zenith—the Superman, who is now put before us with overpowering passion as the aim of our life, hope and will. . . . Stated briefly, the leading principle of this new system of valuing would be: 'All that proceeds from power is good, all that springs from weakness is bad.'"—Elizabeth Forster-Nietzsche, Nietzsche's sister, writing in 1905.

The first five quotations all come from science-fiction sources, the van Vogt of course being the oldest.

A word about the Ellison quote from "The Deathbird." The story is quite complex, but basically, though, it pictures Satan (Snake) as man's friend, and God as enemy; it was Snake who showed man he could be like God—more powerful than God, even. The height of love, of power, in man is shown by his ability to say yes or no to life; to determine his own destiny as far life and death go. The climax of the story tells of Stack's putting Mother Earth to rest finally (after ole' Earth had reeled under sickness and attack for centuries) out of this "love" for the earth. Thereby showing man's freedom from the restraints and constraints of God—like the man who committed suicide in a fit of freedom! The vision is dark, terribly dark. The final greatness of man is to say, "Now I die." This seems to be a thought expressed more and more in today's science fiction. But it is a reflection of today's pessimism, not an extrapolation. In one sense it is less a "dangerous vision" than a powerful way of expressing some of today's thinking.

In fact all of the quotations are dark visions of what reason can do when God is removed. If today's society (and modern science fiction) start with the assumption of a-theism, then man becomes merely a high product of his environment. From this two branches open up, and these branches represent today's thinking (or a lot of today's thinking) and today's science fiction (or a lot of today's science fiction).

One branch says man should seek to become closer and closer to the environment from which he was spawned. This leads to "one-with-nature," loss of the individual as

important—the laws of survival are statistical, not individual!—and loss of any real basis for ethics, for determining right and wrong. Nexialism sounds good at first glance: there is truth in the interdependence of nature and the universe. Yet it soon, in practice, boils down to pragmatic—practical—solutions to any question. When all the universe is one, there can be no values/ethics "higher" than the universe, only derived from it. Can you see how the celebration of Nexialism can lead to the thought of Charles Manson? Ted, what is the logical outcome of your own thinking?

The second branch is an exultation of man-as-he-is. Man is ugly and evil and power-hungry and greedy? Great! Let *those* be our values! Can you see it is but a small step from the "un-thinkable thoughts" of Dick Geis to those of Nietzsche, then to Hitler? Again, our only values or ethics are derived from ourselves, from observations made about ourselves, from our reason or emotion or will or all in some combination.

Is much of science fiction in a malaise? Is it taking refuge in literary style and psychological portrayals to express its darkening vision? If the Heinlein Individual has made his own world by sheer strength and personality, are we left with Ellison's dark honesty when that world is exposed as a sham? How many times can we choke on such phrases as "sense of wonder" and the "glories of technology" while deluding ourselves with our own manufactured values? Is science fiction on the cutting edge of anything, really? Or is it merely seeing other worlds through the same old presuppositions of today's world?

There are alternatives.

STRONG QUESTIONS, THESE. But I am

not sure I agree with Dan's basic postulates. For instance, I seriously question whether stf has ever reflected an advanced viewpoint beyond that of the milieu in which it was produced. Each and every stf author is himself (or herself) a product of his environment. His ideas and philosophies will be in some respect an outgrowth of that environment, either reflecting the attitudes and preoccupations of that environment or rising in reaction against that environment.

It is certainly true that present day stf writers have largely rejected the utopian thinking of earlier generations of this century: we have discovered to our sorrow that science and technology are not cure-alls, nor will their continued development usher in a new era of peace and enlightenment. Sorrowfully we must conclude that man's capacity to hate his fellow man is fully as unlimited as is his capacity to love and co-exist with him. Short-sightedness and greed have ruled history, both ancient and current. But only now have we had in our hands the power to doom all life on our planet—via a variety of means, from nuclear holocaust to pollution.

Barnett's interpretations of the quotes he gives are not my own. Nexialism, for instance, does not seem to me to boil down to pragmatic—practical—solutions to any question. The Nexialist concept is that of crossing the confines of specialized sciences to find serendipitous solutions for problems. The Nexialist is aware (as van Vogt postulated him) of ramifications—he seeks solutions which answer the total question and not merely the immediate one. This is surely of ever-greater importance in today's world and will be of paramount importance in tomorrow's

world—as we become more interdependent with the global systems (energy, ecology, etc.) we have created. Piecemeal answers will no longer suffice.

As for the question of ethics or values derived from the universe, rather than "higher" than it, this is a red herring. Our values have never been "higher" than those of the universe except in our own awareness of them. God did not create man; man created God—and not once, but many times, as many gods, to satisfy his emotional needs.

The quote from Charles Manson (who derived many of his values from Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*) supports my point. "If God is One, what is bad?" And if God does not exist, but is simply a human rationalisation, we are deprived of outside justification for our crimes and must shoulder the responsibility for them ourselves.

And the "logical outcome" of my own thinking, as expressed in Dan's quote? Humility, I would hope: an awareness that we cannot elevate ourselves above our life-environment (as we strived to do until very recently), but are locked into interdependence with it and must learn to live in harmony with it. . . or we will surely perish with it, as our own executioners.

The life on this planet is a system of interrelated subsystems. On a larger scale the same is true of the universe. The only valid ethics are those which will bring about an intra- and inter-system harmony—a harmony which would ultimately include that of humans to humans.

Is it possible to find these ethics in stf? Can stf authors promulgate them, or show their effects? That, I'm afraid, depends upon each and every

individual author—and just how he (or she) views the universe and our particular pebble therein. But for openers, I might suggest reading a novel which will undoubtedly figure in the forthcoming Hugo and Nebula nominations for the Best Novel of 1974: Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dis-*

possessed. Certainly Ms. Le Guin has not supplied any Ultimate Answers, but she has asked important questions and dealt with them with fierce honesty.

Can we ask more of any sf author?

—TED WHITE

Name Of The Game (cont. from page 89)

"Am I in time?" he gasped as a wizened little man peered at him from behind the counter.

There was a fractional pause. Then the man asked, cautiously, "In time for what?"

"To go to work. You know—Rafe Zinn sent me here."

This time the pause was longer. "Rafe Zinn?" The man glanced about as if to make sure no one could overhear. "I heard he was dead. You have any identification?"

Desperately McLeod reached into his pockets, only to remember that he had torn up Zinn's letter.

"I—I had a letter from Zinn. I lost it. He said to be here—that I could go in his place—to work."

The little man shook his head sadly. "I believe you, young man. Sorry I can't help you. Truly sorry."

"But—but he told me to come. I swear it."

The man's head bobbed. "I said

I believed you. But you're too late. They left—five minutes ago."

"Can you tell me which way they went? I'll follow."

"Sorry. I don't know. They didn't tell me. Security reasons, you know. The men who really wanted to work were here on time." Then the little man smiled. "But cheer up, fellow. You still have a chance."

McLeod felt relief wash over him, leaving him almost weak enough to collapse. "Tell me—when do the next ones leave?"

"Oh, there won't be another crew. This was it."

"But—but you said—"

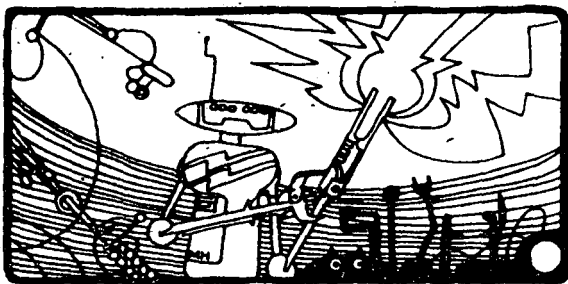
"I said you'd have your chance to work. Haven't you heard, young fellow? They've opened the Games to Competes. Try out next year. A fine, brawny fellow like you—maybe you'll win, and have the opportunity to do your Honest Day's Work."

—RACHEL COSGROVE PAYES

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...OR SO YOU SAY



Letters intended for publication should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of each sheet, and addressed to Or So You Say, Box 409, Falls Church, Va., 22046.

Dear Ted,

If you gave some kind of Con listing in your mags we'd appreciate the following insert.

The 26th Annual MidWestCon will be held on June 27th—29th, 1975, at The Quality Inn Central 4747 Montgomery Rd. Cincinnati, Ohio 45212. Guest of Honor Andrew J. Offutt. For further info and reservation cards contact Lou Tabakow 3953 St. Johns Terrace, Cincinnati, Ohio 45236.

Hope to see you in June, if not before.

LOU TABAKOW

3953 St. Johns Terrace
Cincinnati, Ohio, 45236

Although we do not run a calendar of conventions, I'm always ready to publish letters like Lou's (and Ron Nagey's, in our October, 1974, issue), whenever I receive them. And, in the case of the MidWestCon, I can add that I'll certainly be attending this, my favorite "relaxicon," and hope to see all my old (and new) friends there. —TW

Dear Mr White

Two very, very nice things in the

October AMAZING, Susan Wood Glicksohn's *Clubhouse* and Brian Stableford's "The Sun's Tears". The requiems for Apollo seemed out of place, and a happier substitute would have been another short story, though no adverse comment on the pieces themselves is implied. One cannot but regret the interpolation of politics, in all of its phases, into periodicals devoted to science fiction and fantasy. The meaty, factual article is no substitute for fiction, since there are magazines devoted to such matters.

Returning to SWG's *Clubhouse*, she has no problem at all. Her writing is earnest, enthusiastic, sympathetic and workman-like. All too frequently a review is turned into an essay intended to demonstrate the critic's vast and impressive knowledge, and the actual review gets very short shrift. In the local gabble, an OK—BOK for the young lady.

As to BS, "Sun's Tears" was certainly a most pleasing neo-Kiplingesque story. There were some unfortunate phrases best described as ripped, raveled, and run-down-at-the-heel, but very few of these. The writing was generally estimable, with due respect to denotation and connotation. The names of the characters were somewhat too descriptive: Colfax (Cold Facts), Orgoglio (rather

Shakespearean), and Siorane (rather in the fashion of names in the sentimental tales of Donn Byrne, seated in Ireland). The hocus-pocus involved in getting the protagonist into and out of his temporary Eden was also a blemish. Very like John Carter going to sleep in an Arizona cave and awakening on Mars.

Despite these protests, quite the best story in the past year.

ALEXANDER DONIPHAN WALLACE
306 E. Gatehouse Drive, Apt. H
Metairie, Louisiana, 70001

Dear Ted,

What's up with the magazine covers for the month of October? AMAZING looks like *Analog*, *If* looks like *F&SF* did a few years ago, and *Analog* and *Galaxy* look like old *Planet Stories*. Variety is the spice of life, to be sure, but not when it creates an identity crisis.

Seriously, the cover photo for the October AMAZING was very good and the logo was fitted in just nicely. I have often wondered why SF zines don't use photos and or photo-montages more. Your October issue and a 1951 copy of *Astounding* (featuring a scene from *Destination Moon*) are the only two issues I can think of to do so. [There have been others.—TW]

Surely there are enough wonderous sights to be seen on both a cosmic and a micro-cosmic level to warrant cover space on a SF zine.

I thought Brian M. Stableford's *To Challenge Chaos* was the second most assinine SF novel ever written, surpassed only by *Galaxy 666* (I've forgotten the author of that particular abortion, thank Ghod). Needless to say, I was pleasantly surprised with "The Sun's Tears," a very clever variation on the Quest. I enjoyed it so

much that I might even track down his other three novels and give them a whirl. Jeff Jones' artwork was good, the image of Man and TEM (Tiny Eyed Monster) being quite vivid. Now, if the aliens of *Star Trek* had only left such an impression. *sigh*

Speaking of Jones, all I can say is that "Downfall" went completely over my head. And I thought I was sophisticated because I drank tequila before it became chic. Just goes to show that you can never tell.

Jeff Jones' story reminded me of his art, a graphic but delicate center surrounded by white void (does the man have eye problems by any chance?). Indeed, "Downfall" reminded me a lot of the comic strip he draws for *National Lampoon*, which is strange for even that magazine. Still, I'd like to read future stories by him, but not too many.

"Requiem for Apollo" was a good presentation of point-counter point, though Jack C. Haldeman went more into the "Why?" than Sandra Miesel. Still, I back Ms. Miesel's viewpoint because I am an incurable optimist (sit in on a poker game with me and you'll see just how optimistic I can get).

I think a 25¢ handling charge is appropriate for all unsolicited manuscripts, especially since the slush pile readers are working as a (reading) public service.

How well are the stories read? All the way through or just far enough to turn the reader's stomach? Some people can be quite arbitrary, I had a friend once who claimed that any novel that began "Slowly she. . . ." was pornography. After all, a reader who hates stories about Adam and Eve being crashed astronauts might very well reject a story like Larry Niven's *Protector* if it was written by

an unknown. Do you, Ted, occasionally look at a few at random, just to get an idea of what's being submitted or did your term, as *F&SF's* first reader cure you for good?

John P. Illegible (aka Conlon) pointed out something that I consider quite vital. We teach kids how to drive and give safety lectures on the same, we warn about drugs and offer all sorts of material to inform and aid, we even discuss the pros and cons of sex (where the public is enlightened enough to realize it isn't a Communist plot to conquer the world), but about all the fire arms education is "Treat every gun as if it were loaded."

Look, guns are designed to move an object from point A to point B at a high velocity and with as much accuracy as possible. Some guns (such as a .410 shotgun) are only designed for killing birds, some (such as a M-16) are designed for killing people, some (such as a .22 single shot bolt action rifle) are designed for shooting tin cans, and some (such as 95% of all automatic pistols) are designed to do little more than look impressive and make a big noise.

Now, all guns can kill if handled carelessly. An object the size of a .22 bullet will puncture human skin at 300 fps, .22 shorts have a muzzle velocity of 700 fps. An Army .45 pistol sends its bullets fast enough to poke holes in three or four people if they are careless enough to be lined up close together.

But on TV we see heroes taking bullets in the shoulder without even flinching (with the high concentration of nerves, tendons, blood vessels, and bone in the shoulder region, any bullet wound would be extremely serious), tossing and kicking pistols around without accidentally firing any, firing machine guns from the hip

with no barrel climb, and blasting away with shot guns and high power rifles without a bit of recoil. A great many gun deaths come from people who see make believe and accept it for reality. For how many people were their last words, "Watch this, I saw it last night on television?"

The Army has an excellent way of teaching you how to handle firearms properly. They treat you like an idiot at all times. Failing to keep a weapon pointed downrange at all times, firing out of turn, leaving a round in the chamber when you leave the pits, all of these are excellent reasons for you to knock out 250 push-ups or crawl on your hands and knees back to the barracks. The Army's weapons are designed for one specific purpose, killing people in combat situations. A fully automatic weapon is most definitely no toy.

But most people who purchase guns either don't know what they're buying and get the wrong firearm for the wrong reason or else they get on a *machismo* craze and think they're John Wayne or Audey Murphy.

The city apartment dweller who sees *Dirty Harry* and buys a .44 magnum can quite easily kill somebody in the next two or three rooms if he shoots at an intruder and misses. A woman who buys a .25 purse automatic pistol will discover that tiny guns tend to jam more than bigger ones. And Ghod help the asshole who buys a pistol and some ammo and leaves them in a drawer, never practicing or cleaning them, until two years later when he thinks he hears a burglar and blows his foot/hand/head off trying to load a rusted pistol in the dark.

The *machismo* types are popular down South, in the West, and in most ghettos. They usually buy the biggest, flashiest, most expensive

guns they can find and stick them under their coat so they won't be seen except by their friends and every policeman they run across. Despite the grace of Napoleon Solo and James Bond, drawing a handgun from a shoulder holster hidden under a coat can lead to snagged threads, torn pockets, and gaping chest wounds, all of which can lead to embarrassing questions by the cleaners, the tailors, and the doctors in the emergency ward.

I am not anti-gun, I find shooting firearms to be very enjoyable. But I do wish that a fair (i.e., neither pro nor anti) firearm instruction class would be included in every grade school. The idiots who don't know what they're doing are giving the rest of us a bad name.

SP4 HUBERT C. DIXON
413-90-1390

4th Spt. Co. 4th MSL COMD
Trans.

Camp Page, Chunchon, Korea
APO SF 96208

Ted:

I enjoyed Jack Vance's novel, "The Domains of Korphon," concluded in the October issue of AMAZING, but I am left puzzled by the logic implied by the ending.

If the Erjinns were once a race capable of building a magnificent temple and using space ships, which both indicate a sophisticated technological state, then how are we to account for the primitive state we find them in at the time of the story?

I can think of only two possibilities. One, that through contact with the truly primitive Morphotes, the Erjinns were subverted through cultural osmosis, or two, that once they had achieved control of Koryphon they abandoned artistic pursuits (the tem-

ple art) for the more worldly considerations of building roads, resorts, swimming pools and the like, and thus lacking sufficient counterbalance, fell into a state of savagery.

If the second is true, then the economic frivolities of Schaine, and the general character of the people of Olanje, seem to indicate that a similar process of degeneration is underway amongst the humans. (The only human who has any aesthetic sense about him is Elvo and he is an Out-ker by default.)

If the first reason is true, then Gerz' arguments before the Mull, despite his gratuitous statements to the contrary, merely serve to maintain an elitist separation from the Uldar (who are by analogy to the humans as the Morphotes are to the Erjinns).

Is this dark undercurrent a literary message of impending doom? Or does Mr. Vance secretly live in South Africa?

THEO EISEN
30 Newton Drive
East Falmouth, Mass.

Dear Ted,

Here I am, expecting the December AMAZING any day now, and I'm only just getting around to writing you about the August and October issues. Sorry for the delay, but it seems like it's either feast or famine for me when it comes to sf, and I've only just recovered from a severe case of typographical over-eating.

First, a little sincere flattery. Sixteen years ago a copy of *Android Avenger*, by one Ted White, found its way into my possession (great s&s; vide Watson, April OSYS. . .). God only knows how many times I've read it since; ten, at least—maybe more. (Isaac Asimov may be blessed with a perfect memory, but I have the per-

fect of memory. After a year—give or take—all I remember clearly is whether the book, story, or whatever, is something I'd want to reread.) So when I opened the Aug. A and read your intro to "Manhattan Square Dance," I knew I was going to enjoy it. Sure enough. . . (By the way; pardon my ignorance, but just who is Calvin Demmon?) *[Little is known about Calvin Demmon; he published four short-short stories in F&SF in the early 1960's and disappeared, lending credence to the rumor that he was another B. Traven. He reappeared with "Servo" in the March, 1971, issue of this magazine, and a second story, "Who's Afraid?", was published in the December, 1972 issue of FANTASTIC. Our collaboration was carried out via the most secretive methods involving messengers who ferried material back and forth between us—and such were the rigors of this system we only wrote the one story—"Manhattan Square Dance"—together. Rumor has it that Demmon is today living in exile in a remote part of Canada, having been unable to date to find a publisher for his mainstream novel. Does that answer your question?—TW]*

The August cover was superb; Todd & Bode (Vaughn, or Vincent?) make a great team. I don't suppose there's any connection, but at first glance the artwork reminded me forcefully of George R. R. Martin's "With Morning Comes Mistfall." Nothing blatant, you understand; just a strange prod at my memory. Good stuff—as good in its way as Jeff Jones in his. Higher praise I cannot give, nor conceive.

I want to comment quickly on two letters in the August OSYS, then I'll move on to October. Craig Strete's letter proves that there are black sheep in every family, even if it is

"one big happy" for the most part. My introduction to fandom (organized, sort of) was at MidWestCon this past June, and I must say it was pleasant. I only hope that Craig can convince his friends to give us (fandom, that is) another chance. We deserve it—and so do they.

When Leah Zeldes' letter appeared in February, I guess I felt pretty much the same way Leonard Zettel says he did. After the M-Con, I wrote to her and carped and cavilled; how dare she this and how dare she that! We've been writing back and forth ever since, but while I'm glad I started the correspondence I'm sorry I wrote some of what I did. One thing I had to say, though—and I'll stand by it now—was this: "Considering the size of recent worldcons, it's not surprising you had a hard time trying to find a few kindred souls there among the multitudes. With roughly 2500 people to choose from, many of whom (e.g. Trekkies & comix freaks) have less interest in sf and/or fantasy than a stone has in tapdancing, a few rebuffs at first can have a discouraging effect; I can understand that." The point that Mr. Zettel (and myself, in 10 or 15 years) should remember is that neos are often fragile; an indelicate touch can sometimes, albeit unintentionally, shatter their interest (*viz.* Craig Strete's friends). But a little encouragement will go a long way. (And if this is in print and you're reading it, Leah—I'm sorry about that first letter.)

On to October.

With the conclusion of "The Domains of Koryphon," my acquaintance with Jack Vance now extends to three novels and two short stories. I've found all of these most enjoyable, and now I can say with certainty just what it is about Vance's writing that I find

so pleasing. No matter what may happen in the course of a story—no matter how much may happen to the characters involved—there is a sense of stability about the whole, a promise that life will (for most) go on. I

have yet to find this so clearly projected in the works of any other author.

SCOTT STREET
1952 Lehigh Ave.
Cincinnati, Ohio, 45230

The Clubhouse (cont. from page 105)

Some closing points: Australia is another country, with different seasons, electrical voltages, stamps and money. Aussie faneds, like Canadian and British ones, lose considerable sums on us cheques. Before subscribing, check the rates (in Australian dollars unless otherwise indicated); then buy a bank or post office money order, on which *you* pay exchange and handling costs.

Be prepared to wait several months, too, for fanzines to arrive by

sea mail.

APOLOGIES: to all of you who have sent fanzines and letters without getting any reply. Answering my mail threatens to become a full time job, and I already have two of those. I do appreciate everything you send, even though I can't reply individually.

—SUSAN WOOD
Department of English
University of Regina
Regina, Sask. S4S 0A2

Dominion (cont. from page 100)

"Jack." Swiftly the knife wrenched free, glinting hard and real beneath the streetlamp. "Jack called the Ripper."

Screaming, Grace backed away. A laugh of triumph rang in the back of her mind as she waited for the cold steel.

"My poor girl," said the figure, approaching.

Grace halted, astonished. It wasn't right. The line went: "Foulness. Scream your lungs. The fog will bury them."

Transfixed, Grace watched as the dark figure wavered, melted and took on new form. A tall woman, her hair grey, her eyes old, smiled softly at Grace.

"You cheated me!" Grace tried to throw herself on the knife still brandished in the figure's right

hand, but her steps faltered. The old woman jerked the knife away, threw it clattering into an alley.

Grace fell against her, collapsed sobbing to her knees. "You knew. Someone else tried it before. You knew."

"There, there," crooned the old woman, kneeling. "It's over. No one else, dear girl." She stroked Grace's hair.

"Someone told. The doctor. No he couldn't—"

"Clara. She was worried about your state."

"I'll try again and again!" Shouted Grace, but she did not struggle when the old woman embraced her in warm enveloping arms.

—KEN WISMAN

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